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Publication Program, 2006: Volume IV (Biannual).

Subscriber Information: Subscription prices year 2006 (Vol. 4, 2 issues) including postage and handling: Institutions USD 60.00/EURO 60.00. Private individuals or students may subscribe at the reduced rate of USD 30.00/EURO 30.00. Subscriptions, changes of address, advertisement rates, and other requests should be sent to Parviz Morewedge, Global Scholarly Publications, 220 Madison Avenue Suite 11-G, New York, NY 10016, USA.

© 2006 by Global Scholarly Publications. Printed in the USA.
ISSN: 1544-1326

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF SHĪ'Ī STUDIES

Volume IV, No. 2, 2006

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The Tradition of the Holy Grail in Shi'a Islam¹

Michael McClain

Research Fellow, GSP

One of the great enigmas of Indo-European studies is the precise nature of the relation between the Celts and the Indo-Iranian peoples. Specialists in the fields of religion, art, customs and literary forms tend to consider the Celts as an Eastern Aryan people migrated to the West, while those whose specialty is more strictly linguistic tend to affirm that the Celts are a Western people akin to the Italic peoples. Here then is the enigma. Personally, I believe that the Celts are an Eastern Aryan people who migrated to the West and whose language was strongly influenced or "westernized" by contacts with Western Indo-European peoples, i.e., Illyrians, Thracians, Ligurians, Italics. I simply believe that that there are many things in Celtic Studies which can be explained only by assuming a common origin for the Celts and the Indo-Iranian peoples, and that it is far easier to alter the language of a people than it is to change their religion, customs, art forms, moral and spiritual values and general *môde d'être*. This is, of course, only an opinion, and people whom I like and respect very much hold different points of view on this topic.

What no one questions is that there does indeed exist some sort of special relationship between the Celts and the Indo-Iranian peoples. The controversy is in reference to the precise nature of this relation, not as to its existence....

¹ Excerpted from the unpublished book *Persian Traditions in Spain* by Michael McClain.

Celtic art is most certainly nearer to that of the Iranian nomads of the Eurasian Steppes than to any other. Typical Celtic motifs, such as the spiral, trisquele and revolving wheel are common in the popular and traditional arts of Iran to this day.² Various people have noted that at times it is impossible to distinguish between Celtic and Scythian pieces.³ In the Celtic "animal style", the shape of the animal often dissolves into complex spirals and whorls.⁴ This also occurs in the Scythian and Sarmatian "animal style", though perhaps less frequently than in the Celtic.⁵ The whorls, spirals and trisqueles so frequent in Celtic art also abound in Scythian and Sarmatian art.⁶ Because of its fondness for enamel polychrome, in general it may be said

² *Living Tradition of Iran's Crafts*, Jasleen Dhamija, Tehran, 1979, pp. 36 - 37 (photos), 60, 68 -69 (photos).

³ See the books of Henri Hubert, *Los Celtas y la Expansion Celtica Hasta la Epoca de La Tene & Los Celtas y la Expansion Celtica Despues de la Epoca de La Tene*, Mexico City, 1956-57. I wish to note here that all books cited by Henri Hubert, Lucien Musset, Louis Charpentier and Rene Huyghe have been published in French as well as Spanish or English. See also *The Heritage of Persia*, Richard N. Frye, Cleveland, Ohio, 1963, pp. 19-20 and *Larousse Encyclopedia of Byzantine and Medieval Art*, Rene Huyghe, ed., London, 1963, pp. 72-73.

⁴ *Celtic Design: Animal Patterns*, Aidan Meehan, New York, 1992, the whole book. *Celtic Design: The Dragon and the Griffin*, Aidan Meehan, London, 1995, the whole book.

⁵ *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes*, edited by Joan Aruz, Ann Farkas, Andrei Alekseev and Elena Korolkova, essay "Scythian Art from the Pontic Steppes", Liudmila Galanina, p. 191, pp. 84-85, 215-217 (illustrations).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 102, 104, 105, 107, 112, 114, 116, 117, 128, 130, 131, 140, 141, 158 (Note very Celtic-looking trisqueles), 215, 216-217, 252-253, 263, 264, 274.

that Celtic art resembles Sarmatian art even more than it does Scythian art. The *trisquele*, an archetypically Celtic motif, is still widely used today in folk art of the Caucasus, notably in Daghestan in the North Caucasus.⁷ The revolving wheel, another archetypically Celtic motif, is also widely used today in the folk art of Tajikistan, Central Asian home of the Persian-speaking Tajiks.⁸ Celtic chiefs wore torques as a symbol of authority, as did the chiefs of the Sakas, i.e., the Iranian peoples of the Eurasian steppes, such as Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans.⁹ The name "Viriatus", Spanish Celtic hero of the long struggle against the Romans, is a Latinized version of a Celtic name which means "torque wearer". We will encounter Latinized Celtic names in other places....

In the field of religion, the resemblances are closer still. Speaking of the Druids, the Brahmins and the Magi, Henri Hubert says: "Here one encounters not only comparable priesthoods, but identical priesthoods which were only well conserved in the two (geographical) extremes of the Indo-

⁷ *Folk Art in the Soviet Union*, Tatyana Razina, Natalia Cherkasova, & Alexander Kantsedikov, New York, 1990, p. 159.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 399.

⁹ *Kievan Russia*, George Vernadsky, New Haven, Connecticut, 1948, p. 122; *The Arts of Ancient Iran*, Roman Ghirshman, New York, 1964, pp. 113-114; *Iranians & Greeks in South Russia*, Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeff, New York, 1969, pp. 100, 124, 125, 132, 133, 138, 177, 182, 184, 186, 187; *The Golden Deer ...* essay "images of the Mounted Steppe Warrior", p. 59, pp. 170-171, 181-182 (illustrations). *Celtic Art*, Ruth and Vincent Megaw, New York, 1989, virtually the whole book; *Pagan Celtic Ireland*, Barry Raflery, London, 1994, virtually the whole book; *The Celtic World*, edited by Miranda J. Green, London, 1995; essay "Appearance, Life and Liesure", by Glenys Lloyd-Morgan, pp. 102-103; Essay "The Technology of Metalwork: Bronze and Gold" by Peter Northover, pp. 300-301, 304; Essay "Ireland, a World Without the Romans", by Barry Raflery, pp. 639-640, 644.

European peoples."¹⁰ And Henri Beer: "Certain elements of Druidism proceed from the depths of the Indo-European soul, and are related to the doctrines of the Brahmins and the magi."¹¹

It is of course well known that the ancient Indo-European peoples used a drug called Soma in Sanskrit and *Haoma* in Avestan in their religious ceremonies.¹² This drug was pressed from the plant of the same name, mixed with cow's milk *haomaya gava* in Avestan)¹³ and drunk after an elaborate ceremony.¹⁴ The Druids rigorously preserved the ceremony of the Soma or Haoma. Long after the Celts had migrated to regions where said plant does not grow,¹⁵ the only difference being the absence of the drug itself. The words which have to do with religion are almost identical in Celtic and Sanskrit.¹⁶ Lighting a fire was part of the ceremony¹⁷ *andaidd* in Celtic, *inddha* in Sanskrit¹⁸; to drink (as part of the ceremony) is *ibim* in Celtic, *pibami* in Sanskrit¹⁹ (Sanskrit – *piba* = "drink", *mi* = "approach").²⁰

¹⁰ *Los Celtas Despues...*, H. Hubert, p. 181.

¹¹ Cited by Hubert in *Los Celtas Despues...*, p. x.

¹² *A Vedic Reader for Students*, A.A. MacDonell, Madras, 1970, pp. 152-155, 254 & *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra*, Ilya Gershevitch, Cambridge, England, 1959, pp. 233-234, 272-273.

¹³ Gershevitch, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁴ Idem., pp. 116-117, and *The Wonder That Was India*, A.L. Basham, New York, 1959, p. 235.

¹⁵ H. Hubert, *Los Celtas Despues...*, p. 65.

¹⁶ Idem., p. 65

¹⁷ Gershevitch, op. cit., pp. 116-117, and Basham, op. cit., p. 235.

¹⁸ Hubert, *Los Celtas Despues...*, p. 65.

¹⁹ Idem., p. 65.

Cow's milk as the sacred beverage was called *suth* by the Druids, a word which means "pressed".²¹ In Vedic Sanskrit, *Suta-soma* — means "prepare the Soma" (*suta* = "produce").²² Arthur A. MacDonell relates the word *Soma* or *Haoma* to the Vedic Sanskrit *su* which means "to press".²³ "To press" in Avestan is *hu*.²⁴ The above seems to me to be conclusive proof that the Celts separated from the Indo-Iranians and migrated to the West after the discovery of *Soma* or *Haoma*....

Origins of the Arthurian Cycle

Before dealing with the Holy Grail, an element which Celts and Iranians have in common, we will speak briefly of the Arthurian Cycle, in which the question of the Holy Grail has become embedded.

C. Scott Littleton & Linda A. Malcor have recently edited a book titled *From Scythia to Camelot*²⁵ in which they ascribe the origins of the Arthurian Cycle to the Sarmatian and Alans, whom the Romans employed as mercenaries and stationed in parts of Western Europe including northern Britain and Armorica (Brittany), and who also came to western Europe with the Goths. Certainly this is a most

²⁰ Idem., p. 65.

²¹ Idem., p. 65.

²² Idem., p. 65.

²³ *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary*, A.A. MacDonell, Oxford, 1971. MacDonell, *Vedic Reader*, pp. 152-155.

²⁴ Idem., p. 155.

²⁵ *From Scythia to Camelot*, edited by C. Scott Littleton & Linda A. Malcor, New York, 2000.

fascinating idea. However, the authors are making a case, and in so doing tend to overlook two key factors:

- 1.) When dealing with Indo-European peoples, it is often not possible to be certain what is the influence of one people upon another, and what is simply derived from a common Indo-European background.
- 2.) Specifically, throughout the present book we shall refer to the many and close affinities between two Indo-European peoples, i.e., the Celts and the Iranian peoples, both Persian and *Sakas* or Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans. To give a concrete example, Littleton & Malcor ascribe all personal and place names in Western Europe, such as "Allan", "Allaen", "Alain" and a long et cetera to the Alans. As we shall see in the next chapter, many or most of these names also have a perfectly logical Celtic etymology.

In summary, most of the so-called Sarmatian and Alanic elements in the Arthurian Cycle reinforced and perhaps revitalized Celtic elements already present. However, Littleton and Malcor do mention one important element which I have not found in any non-Arthurian Celtic work, nor is it found in the earliest Welsh sources. This last is important, because as Littleton and Malcor indicate, Wales was one part of Western Europe in which Sarmatians and/or Alans were never stationed, and to which they could not have come with the Goths, as the Goths were never in Wales.

The element to which we are referring is the famous "sword in the stone", or, less commonly "sword in the anvil". Though not found in the earliest Welsh sources, as we said, the image of the young Arthur drawing a sword from a stone

and thereby proving his right to be High King of Britain is found in various sources, from *Merlin* by Robert de Boron (1191-1202) to *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory. In *Estoire de Merlin*, *Quest del Sant Graal*, and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Sir Galahad draws Balion's sword from a floating stone. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Sir Lancelot draws a sword from the altar stone of the Chapel Nigramous.

Obviously, the meaning of drawing the sword from the stone is not the same in all the above examples, as neither Sir Galahad nor Sir Lancelot are of royal lineage and so cannot aspire to be High King of Britain. Sir Galahad's drawing of the sword from the floating stone proves that he is the most noble, perfect knight, while Sir Lancelot's drawing the sword from the altar stone only proves his right to pursue a quest.

As we said above, there are no non-Arthurian Celtic examples of the "sword in the stone". However, as Ammianus Marcellinus noted: "The Alan's only idea of religion was to plunge a naked sword into the earth with barbaric ceremonies, and they worship that (sword) with great respect."²⁶

Herodotus noted that in honor of their war god, the Scythians made heaps of brushwood which were perpendicular on three sides but sloped on the fourth. At the top of this pile of brush was planted a sword as an image of the god.²⁷ There is nothing to indicate that the ancient Celts ever practiced similar rites. Certainly it is not difficult to imagine that extracting the sword from the earth had great significance had great significance to the Alans. Remember, Sir Lancelot extracts the sword from the altar stone of a chapel.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 185.

As we shall discuss in the following chapter, the Ossetians of the Caucasus are descendants of the Alans, and have their own epic cycle, the *Nart Cycle*. The extraction of a sword from the anvil of Tlepsh is a prominent element in the *Nart Cycle*.²⁸ In the majority of the Arthurian romances, the sacred sword is embedded in an anvil, which in turn is embedded in a stone. Since a sword is forged on an anvil, the connection is obvious.

There are elements in the Arthurian Cycle in general and the Grail Legend in particular which are Iranian, but Persian rather than Sarmatian or Alanic. Friedrich von Suutschek claimed that the Arthurian Cycle is of Iranian origin and that Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and the Gawaine romances are free translations from the Persian, in effect saying that Wolfram's *Parzival* should be titled *Parzivalnama*.²⁹ Unfortunately I do not have access to Friedrich von Suutschek's work, nor do I read German.

Granted that von Suutschek's views are extreme, the very fact that his studies led him to such conclusions is highly significant. My own views remain unchanged, i.e., that the Arthurian Cycle is fundamentally Celtic, with Iranian – both Persian and Alanic-Sarmatian – elements added later. In addition, the Grail Legends contain Mithraic and specifically Christian elements as well as Celtic and Iranian.

One element found prominently in the Arthurian Cycle which has no pre-Arthurian Celtic antecedents but does indeed have a Persian antecedent is the "Lady of the Lake", much later used as the title of a non-Arthurian romance by Sir Walter Scott. Perhaps another Alanic-Sarmatian element

²⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

²⁹ *At the Table of the Grail: Magic and the Use of Imagination*, edited by John Matthews, London, 1987, essay "The Meeting of the Waters" by Hannah Closs, p. 41.

is added when Sir Lancelot hurls King Arthur's sword *Excalibur* into the lake and its hilt is grasped by the Lady of the Lake who brandishes it three times and vanishes (in some sources it is Sir Bedevere rather than Sir Lancelot who hurls *Excalibur* into the lake)....

By far the nearest prototype of the Lady of the Lake of the Arthurian Cycle is to be found in the Zoroastrian concept of *Saoshyant*, roughly "Saviour". The Pahlavi tradition, based on Yast XIII:128 of the *Avesta*, speaks of a series of three *Saoshyants*: *Hushetar*, *Hushetarmah* and *Soshyans* = *Saoshyant*, each of whom bring, respectively, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth milleniums to a close. The *Xvarnah*, the "Charisma" or "Golden Aura" of Zoroaster was received by the angel *Neryosang*, who in turn entrusted it to the *Xvarnah*, the "Glory of the Waters", the angel;-goddess *Arđvi Sura Anahita*, "the High, the Sovereign, the Immaculate". The Golden Aura (*Xvarnah*) of Zoroaster is kept in person in the waters of the mystical *Lake Kansaoya*, from which emerge the Mountain of Dawns, *Mons Victorialis*, watched over by multitude of *Fravartis*, celestial archetypes and guides. At the end of each millennium, a maiden will enter the waters of *Lake Kansaoya*, The Light of Glory will be immanent in her body, and she will conceive "one who must master all the evil deeds of demons and men".³⁰

Thus in the Lady of the Lake of the Arthurian Cycle, with her underwater kingdom, we see the Avestan angel Goddess *Arđvi Sura Anahita*, "the High, the Sovereign, the Immaculate" in her underwater kingdom in the mystical *Lake*

³⁰ *Zoroastrians* by Mary Boyce, London, 1979, p. 42. *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, Henry Corbin, translated by Nancy Pearson, Princeton, New Jersey, 1977, pp. 49, 292-292. *En Islam Iranienne*, Tome II, Henry Corbin, Paris, 1971, pp. 86-87.

Kansaoya, perhaps combined with the maiden who enters the waters of *Lake Kansaoya* and conceives "one who must master all the evil deeds of demons and men". In the early Welsh sources, the Lady of the Lake is the mother of Mabon,³¹ while in later sources she is the foster mother of Sir Lancelot.³² That *Arđvi Sura Anahita* and the unnamed maiden who enters the waters of *Lake Kansaoya* and miraculously conceives should become fused into a single person is not surprising....

While I believe it an exaggeration to say that any part of the Arthurian Cycle is "a free translation from the Persian" or that the Arthurian Cycle should be called the *Arthurnama*, it is perfectly true that, although the Arthurian Cycle is fundamentally Celtic, Iranian elements, both Persian and Alanic-Sarmatian, entered it at an early date. This was easy due to the strong affinities between the Celtic and Iranian traditions.

One of the many elements which Celts and Iranians have in common is the Holy Grail. This is a vast and complex topic; indeed, one hardly knows where to begin, rather like the Italian General Cadorna (World War I) who, looking out over the Isonzo Front, said: "We can't take the mountain until we cross the river, and we can't cross the river until we take the mountain."

I intend to demonstrate that among Celts and Iranians the Holy Grail has a common origin, and that, as one might expect, its later development among the two kindred peoples is, to a great extent, parallel.

³¹ *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, Roger Sherman Loomis, London, 1993, p. 193.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 93. *The Arthurian Book of Days*, Caitlin and John Matthews, New York, 1990, pp. 228-29.

The reader will also note that, in general terms, I am in agreement with the great Iranist Henry Corbin, who affirmed that in the Arthurian Cycle in general and the Quest of the Holy Grail in particular there are three elements: 1) Celtic, 2) specifically Christian, and 3) Persian.

The ultimate origin of the Holy Grail among both Celts and Iranians is the *Soma* or *Haoma* ceremony, of which we have spoken at some length.

The *Soma* or *Haoma* ceremony had a most sacred character, and it is easy to see how it could become the nucleus around which much symbolism could collect. As participation in said ceremony required initiation and preparation, the ultimate origin of the "quest" element is clear. Sir John Rhys says: "All these cases (among the Celts) connecting the sacred vessel or its contents with poetry and inspiration, point possibly back to some primitive drink (*Soma* or *Haoma*) brewed by the early Aryans."³³

Dr. D. F. l'Hoste-Ranking notes:

Monsieur Eugene Hucher in his introduction to the legend of the San Graal has shown that this mystic vase may be traced back beyond the sixth Century by means of representations on coins and medals by the Gauls. It is first found among Armoric tribes on coins of the *Uelles* and *Boiocasses* that is, in the parts of Brittany nearest to Gaul. This precious vase served from the earliest times among the Gauls, and above all in Brittany, for the performance of certain sacred rites, and, therefore, (was) easily transformed into the chalice of later Christian legend.³⁴

³³ *The Origin of the Holy Grail*, Sir John Rhys, anthology *Sources of the Grail*, edited by John Matthews, Hudson, New York, 1996, p. 86.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, essay "The Grail Legend", p. 451.

It has been noted several times that Celtic legend is greatly preoccupied with chalices, cups, vases and cauldrons, the reason being obvious. These sacred vessels have various magic properties, including healing, like the cauldron of Lugh, and providing endless food and drink. In this last aspect, we have a very close parallel with the Grail of Jamshid in the *Shah_Namah*, one of whose properties is that its supply of wine is never exhausted. This is recalled by Omar Khayyam:

*Iram indeed is gone with all its Rose,
And Jamshid's seven-ringed cup where no one
knows ...*

and

*They say the lion and the leopard keep
The court where Jamshid gloried and drank
deep...*

There is also a close parallel between the Grail, or *Xvarneh* of Kay Khusrav of the *Shah Namah* and the Holy Grail of Chretien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, but we will deal with this later.

Celtic prototypes of the Holy Grail abound in the Irish, Welsh and Breton traditions.³⁵ In the ancient Welsh *Romance of Culhuch and Olwen*, King Arthur and his knights go to Ireland in a quest for a cauldron.³⁶ The concept of the quest is an important part of the Celtic Tradition, involving a long

³⁵ Ibid., the whole book.

³⁶ *British Myths and Legends*, ed., by Richard Barber, London, 1998, pp. 117-150. *The Romance of Arthur* ed., by James J. Williams, London, 1994, pp. 25-59.

journey and search and the overcoming of obstacles, guardians and adversaries.³⁷

At this point, it is very interesting to note that the Sarmatian tribe known as the *Iazyges* was settled in what is now Lancashire, England in the time of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD), and the descendants of these Sarmatians were still known in the 5th century AD.³⁸

The sacred character of King Arthur's sword *Excalibur*, and, most especially the "sword in the stone" motif are most evocative of the Scythian and Sarmatian "cult of the sword", most exactly, the Scythian representation of their war god as a sword thrust into the earth or an altar made of a mound of twigs and the Sarmatian representation of their war god as a sword stuck into the earth, as we have noted. Most interestingly, the name of the commander of the Sarmatian cavalry in Britain in the 2nd century AD was Lucius Artorius Castus. The *Artor* of *Artorius* is **not** Latin; most likely it is the Celtic word for "bear", perhaps a tribal or clan totem or even an epithet. "Artorius" is therefore almost certainly Latinized version of a Celtic name, something quite common. At a certain period in Gaul, Spain and Britain; we have already given one example of this.

Of course, King Arthur lived much later than the time of Lucius Artorius Castus, but if the Sarmatians of what is today Lancashire had still preserved their identity as late as the 5th century AD, the memory of Lucius Artorius Castus and certain Sarmatian epic motifs may well have survived until

³⁷ *Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom*, Caitlin and John Matthews, Shaftesbury, England, 1994, pp. 350-358.

³⁸ *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes*, edited by Joan Arua, Ann Farkas, Andrei Alekseev and Elena Korolkova, essay "Filippovka and the Art of the Steppes, Ann Farkas, New York, 2001, p. 4.

the time of King Arthur, and it may be that King Arthur was indeed named for the Celtic element in "Artorius". It is most intriguing that there may be a Sarmatian element in the Arthurian Cycle.³⁹

Roger Sherman Loomis has shown that, with the obvious exceptions of Joseph of Arimathea and his son Joseph, all the names of the characters of *Perceval* by Chretien de Troyes and *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach are Celtic, either common personal names or the names of gods.⁴⁰

In my undergraduate years I became interested in the question of universals, something most people considered mere word games. However, somehow I knew that Nominalism is not only wrong but evil; as Richard Weaver said, "Ideas have consequences." Few people in history have done so much evil as William of Occam, the champion of Nominalism. In the Middle Ages, the Church saw Nominalism for what it was, i.e., pernicious nonsense. Thus, St. Thomas Aquinas had no qualms about citing Avicenna (*Ibn Sina*) in order to refute Averroes (*Ibn Rushd*), and the great sixteenth-century Spanish Catholic mystic St. John of the Cross (whose mind and spirit remained thoroughly medieval) had no problem accepting the influence of Muslim Sufis, which influence in turn helped to shield him from the pernicious influence of Nominalism. The Church declared Thomism to be its official philosophy, thereby declaring its opposition to Nominalism and the anti-traditional demon, as well as its adherence to the Tradition with a capital "T", the Sophia Perennis, the Perennial Philosophy. Later, out of

³⁹ Ibid., p. 10; essay "Scythian Gods and Customs" by Liudmila Galanina, p. 57.

⁴⁰ *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, Roger Sherman Loomis, London, 1993, pp. 139-158.

anti-Catholic spite and malice, Protestant and scientific thought embraced Nominalism. That Catholic and Islamic thinkers should oppose Nominalism is obvious, but others as diverse as Charles Peirce, Alfred North Whitehead and Edmund Husserl have proclaimed that Nominalism is not only false, but that it has done great evil. Until quite recent times, Islam has been relatively free of Nominalism; there are no thinkers more anti-Nominalist, more bitterly opposed to Nominalism, than ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi and his Persian Shi'a disciples. To those Protestant louts who constantly scream "Paganism", and condemn St. Thomas Aquinas for being influenced by Muslim thinkers (also "pagans" to their pitiful, cramped and crabbed little minds), Charles Coulombe replied: "Then you should stop breathing, since pagans breathe."

It was because of the triumph of Nominalism that the West so firmly turned its back on Islam. We shall see how the above is relevant to the question of the Holy Grail, and to other topics throughout this book.

In the Grail legends of the Arthurian Cycle, the Grail is variously identified as the cup from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper, a cup in which Joseph of Arimathea collected the blood of Jesus at the Crucifixion, Joseph later bringing it to Britain, or as simply the chalice used to hold communion wine during Mass.

Here we have a sacred cup holding sacred liquid, or, perhaps more precisely, a cup made sacred by the liquid which it contains or contained. (Remember, at the Last Supper Jesus, when offering wine to His disciples, said: "This is my blood ..."). Thus, the parallel between the original cup holding Soma or Haoma and the Christianized Grail is complete. Thus, Henry Corbin speaks of: "...the encounter of Celtism and the (Semi-Apochryphal) Gospel of Nicodemus in the person of Joseph of Arimathea, from

whence proceeds the Cycle of the Holy Grail."⁴¹ It should be noted that the Gospel of Nicodemus, a Crucifixion narrative, though not included in the Canon of the New Testament, was never condemned as heretical.

Henry Corbin has noted in the Arthurian Cycle a fusion of Iranian and Celtic elements.⁴² Now all the elements are present: Celtic, Christian and Iranian.

Wolfram von Eschenbach recognizes as his source *Kyot of Provence*. As Chretien's *Perceval* and Wolfram's *Parzival* have the same general plot, it may be assumed that "Kyot" was one of the sources of both; indeed, Wolfram chides Chretien for not following "Kyot" faithfully. Chretien, being associated with Marie Plantagenet, daughter of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, had far easier access to Celtic sources - Breton, Welsh and Irish - than did Wolfram, and so used a greater variety of source material. The name *Kyot* is a Germanized spelling of a Provençal name, *Guillot* or *Guilhot* being the diminutive of the Provençal or Catalan "Guilhem" or "Guillem", meaning "William".⁴³ Henry and Renee Kahane in *The Krater and the Grail: Hermetic Sources of the Parzival* are inclined to identify Guilhot or Guillot with William of Tudela, author of the *Chanson de la Croisade*

⁴¹ "De la Epopée Heroïque", Henry Corbin, in collection *Face de Dieu, Face de l'Homme*, Paris, 1983, p. 169. *En Islam Iranien*, Vol. II, Henry Corbin, Paris, 1971, p. 166.

⁴² Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, Vol. II, p. 188.

⁴³ *Nouvelle Anthologie de la Lyrique Occitane du Moyen Age*, Pierre Bec, ed., Avignon, 1972, p. 171. *Grammaire de l'Ancien Provençal*, Joseph Anglade, Paris, 1969, p. 372. *Teach Yourself Catalan*, Alan Yates, Chicago, 1975, pp. 247, 275.

Albigeoisie.⁴⁴ I must confess that I see no reason whatever to accept this identification, and many reasons to reject it.

"Provence" in the strict sense means the region of the same name, in the broader sense means "Occitania" or "Pays d'Oc", all the land where the "Langue d'Oc" was spoken. As the Catalan language is near to Provençal, Catalunya might be included in Provence (*Proensa* in Provençal), but not Tudela....

Many things now fall into place with Guillot de Provence as the key. Though Guillot's work - probably in Provençal - is lost, it was no doubt one of the sources used by both Chretien and Wolfram. This last explains the many Provençalisms in Wolfram's, and, to a lesser extent, Chretien's text, as well as why the Holy Grail is called by a Provençal name, i.e., Provençal *grazal*, meaning "vase" or "vessel", spelled *graalz* in the Old French of Chretien and *gral* in Wolfram's German. Here is yet another proof that Guillot was a Provençal from North of the Pyrenees; it is easy to derive *graalz* and *gral* from the Old Provençal *grazal*, but rather more difficult to derive it from the Old Catalan *gresal*.⁴⁵

In the lost work of Guillot come together Celtic, Christian and Persian elements, these last presumably arriving by way of Muslim Spain. I do not believe for one moment that Guillot de Provence (or *Proensa*) is the explanation for all the Persian elements in the Quest of the Holy Grail and the Arthurian Cycle in general, nor that Muslim Spain was the only route by which said Persian

⁴⁴ *The Krater and the Graal: Hermetic Sources of the Parzival*, Henry and Renee Kahane, Urbana, Illinois, 1965, pp. 122-127.

⁴⁵ Ponsoye, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

influences reached the Celtic lands. However, Guillot de Provence is indeed interesting from our point of view, and for obvious reasons.

There are many evidences of Persian influences in the Quest of the Holy Grail and the Arthurian Cycle in general. I have chosen not to discuss the Hermetic elements in the *Quest for the Holy Grail* and in Suhrawardi, because they would require a great deal of space, would lead us too far astray from our main topic, and, when all is said and done, are not of Iranian origin; St. Thomas Aquinas was Italian and Catholic, but Aristotle was neither.

The name "Percival", "Perceval" or "Parzival" has an obvious Persian look and ring to it. R. S. Loomis gives the Welsh name "Peredur" as the origin of the name "Percival,"⁴⁶ which name has a definite Persian flavor, though its Old French and ultimately perhaps Welsh etymology is clear enough. This is at least curious.

In 1270 Albrecht von Scharffenberg proposed to write a comprehensive account of the Holy Grail, a compilation of earlier sources, mainly Chretien and Wolfram.⁴⁷ Albrecht gives the first specific description of the Grail Temple and its location, Mount Salvat (a Provencal or Catalan name; the influence of Guillot de Provence is obvious). Albrecht's description of the Grail Temple matches the description of the Takht-i-Taqdis, the palace built by Khusrau II Parviz in Shiz, Azerbaijan in detail far too precise to be a coincidence.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Loomis, op. cit., pp. 153-154.

⁴⁷ John Matthews, ed., op. cit., essay "Persia and the Holy Grail", by Arthur Upham Pope, p. 334.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 334-338.

Besides the details of construction, the setting of the Grail Temple agrees with Takht-i-Taqdis in being set beside a lake on a mountaintop.⁴⁹ In the Welsh *White Book of Rhydderch*, Peredur visits the Grail Castle three times, once following a river, once crossing a meadow, once going through a forest, exact descriptions of the three approaches to Takht-i-Taqdis.⁵⁰

The Grail Temple could be approached only by men of noble blood, after a long and arduous journey. Each Sassanian Emperor, beginning the day of his coronation, was obliged to travel on foot the 400 miles from Ctesiphon to Shiz, site of Takht-i-Taqdis, certainly an arduous quest.⁵¹

In the 13th Century Latin work *Perlesvaus*, Percival or Peredur arrives at a mysterious castle on an island: "The masters (of the castle) made Percival sit at the master table with themselves. He (Percival) sees a chain of gold come down from above him loaded with precious stones, and in the midst of them a crown of gold."⁵²

The above paragraph powerfully evokes the crown of the Sassanian Emperor Khusrau II Parviz and his successor which crown was so heavy that a man's neck could not support its weight, and was suspended from the ceiling by a golden chain, each link set with a jewel.⁵³ Thus was symbolized the glory and the burden of being emperor.

⁴⁹ Idem.

⁵⁰ Loomis, op. cit., p. 202.

⁵¹ *The Epic of the Kings*, translated by Reuben levy, London, 1977, pp. 391-392.

⁵² Idem.

⁵³ Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, Vol. II, pp. 156-157. Corbin refers to Volume 13 of the *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*, Bombay, 1939.

Henry Corbin noted: "Our Author (Sir Jahangir Coyajee) compares Kay Khusrau with Percival and with King Arthur. He also attempts to trace a positive historical route, to retrace the path of the reencounter [not "encounter"] between Celtism and Iranism."⁵⁴

Certainly there is a close resemblance between King Arthur and his knights on the one hand and Kay Khusrau (Avestan: *Kavi Haosravah*) of the *Shah Namah* and his knights on the other. The Saxons against whom King Arthur fought are exact equivalents of the Turanian enemies of Kay Khusrau. There is a very close resemblance between King Arthur and his knights on the one hand and Kay Khusrau and his knights - Rustam, Bizhan, etc. - on the other. Finn and his companions, the Fianna of the Leinster Cycle of the Irish Epic are sometimes put forward as prototypes of King Arthur and his knights.

However, King Arthur and Kay Khusrau are kings of royal blood, Finn is not. In the tales of Finn and the *Fianna*, the High King (*Ard Righ*) of Ireland is a distant figure. Finn and the *Fianna* are really a "band of comrades in arms". Though sworn vassals of the High King of Ireland, and though they follow rigorous code of chivalry, none of the *Fianna* could be called "knights", nor are they inclined to go off on their own individual adventures and quests.

After his last battle, King Arthur is taken to the mystic Isle of Avalon to be cured of his wounds. Glastonbury is sometimes given as the prototype of Avalon. However, it was in the interest of the Plantagenet Dynasty to identify Glastonbury with Avalon, though Glastonbury could not be considered an island by any stretch of the imagination. If Avalon has a prototype, it would be the Isle of Man, in Gaelic

⁵⁴ Corbin, *Ibid.*, p. 168. Corbin, *Face de Dieu, Face de l'Homme*, essay *De l'Epopée Heroïque*, p. 211.

Vannin or *Mannin*, sacred to the Celtic sea god *Manannan*, as well as secure from Saxon incursions.

The aging Kay Khusrau disappears from the sight of his knights in a blizzard, and is borne to the mystic castle of Kang-Dez.⁵⁵ Finally, King Arthur and Kay Khusrau are both "once and future kings", who never died and who will one day return.⁵⁶

As we shall see in Chapter II, Kai Khusrau belongs to the "Rustam Cycle" or "Seistan Cycle" of the Persian Epic, which appears to have Saka as well as Parthian roots. The possible "Sarmatian connection" of the Arthurian Cycle, of which we have spoken before, looks more and more interesting, though no firm conclusions may be drawn.

There are also close parallels between Kay Khusrau (Avestan: *Kavi Haosravah*) and Percival. Both lose their fathers in similar situations of perfidy and treachery, the mothers of both are princesses, both are taken by their mothers to wild forests and mountains. Both learn the secret of their royal origin. Both Kay Khusrau and Percival pass their childhood in the forests, where they are taught the rules of knighthood; when both appear in a royal court for the first time, they are chided for their ignorance of court etiquette. Both are "lads of a pure heart". Kay Khusrau goes to the court of Kay Kaus, where he is recognized as guardian of the royal *Xvarneh*, *Khvarrah* or *Farr*. Both Kay Khusrau and Percival take a vow of vengeance; Kay Khusrau to avenge the death of Siyavush, his father, and against the violators of *Xvarneh*, while Percival vows to vanquish the enemies of the fisher king and avenge the

⁵⁵ Ibid., *Face de Dieu ...*, p. 211. *En Islam Iranien*, Vol. IV, Henry Corbin, Paris, 1972, p. 329.

⁵⁶ Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, Vol. II, pp. 172-173.

death of Goon, his brother. Both Kay Khusrau and Percival restore the health of a king, both free their country from an evil curse and allow the Spring to break forth. Kay Khusrau becomes sovereign of the Xvarneh, Percival becomes king of the Holy Grail.⁵⁷

Kay Khusrau is said to have the "Grail of Jamshid", which now appears as the "world revealing Grail".⁵⁸ However, this "world revealing Grail" is, apparently, not the same as Xvarneh or Hvarnah (we shall deal with Hvarnah, Xvarneh, Khvarrah or Farr in detail in Chapter II). No doubt due to the influence of the Grail as the cup from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper, or which had held the blood of Jesus, the Celtic Grail retained or recovered its very sacred, mystical character, indeed, as the case of Percival shows, having much of the character of the Persian Xvarneh; if Kay Khusrau is sovereign of Xvarneh, Percival is "King of the Holy Grail". In other words, the Celtic Grail is still the sacred cup, but it is also Xvarneh or Hvarnah, the two aspects being firmly, inseparably united.

Below is a description by a present day dastur or Zoroastrian priest of the role of the cup in the Zoroastrian liturgy:

The (sacred) mixture, when ready, is presented to God and His angelic hosts; and there is a corresponding response from above with (a) downpour of blessings. These enrich or transubstantiate the contents, and the sacrament becomes a chalice or holy-grail, an uplifting or sanctifying medium of grace. Those who partake of it are united in brotherhood, temporarily sharing the same force. Such (a) downpour of forces is called *Nirang* in Avestan (Modern Persian: *Niru*) or "power". All such

⁵⁷ *The Epic of the Kings*, op. cit., p. 166.

⁵⁸ Idem.

objects filled with that power are called "Exalted through Purity".⁵⁹

It is evident that the Legend of the Holy Grail is another proof of the close affinity between the Celts on the one hand and the Iranian peoples on the other. It is also evident that Muslim Spain was one route - though not necessarily the only route - by which the Persian elements in the Grail Legend reached Western Europe.

Arthurian themes have always been popular in Spain, as the popularity of the name "Arturo" shows; as we shall see, there are even Arthurian elements in the *Cantar de Mio Cid*. Spanish versions of Arthurian material are of relatively late date and are not relevant to us at the moment, as they add nothing new.

However, Galicia at least has its own Grail legends, to what degree indigenous, to what degree brought from the Pays d'Oc, France and Britain by pilgrims on the Road to Compostela, I do not know. The leading literary journal in the Gallego-Portuguese language, in which I have had three essays on Celtic topics published, is called *Grial*, which means "Grail". During my long residence in Galicia, I heard of several Grail legends, but was unable to track them down or document them, with one exception.

In the Gallego Province of Lugo (an obviously Celtic name), not far from the border with the Province of Leon, in the high peaks of Cebreiro on the Pilgrim's Road to Santiago de Compostela is a parish called "Pedrafita do Cebreiro".

In Pedrafita do Cebreiro around the year 1300 was a priest who doubted the miracle of transubstantiation.

⁵⁹ *Message of Zarathushtra*, by Dastur Khurshed B. Dabu, Bombay, 1959, p. 153.

"Oh God", said the doubting priest, "my faith is weakened, my being enfeebled and my brain explodes, but I do not see clearly this mystery. A few crosses drawn in the air by my hand and a few words murmured by my mouth, not always clean and pure, how can they achieve such a miracle."

There was a parishoner who lived about a mile and a half from the Pedrafitas do Cebreiro who was so devout that neither thunderstorms nor blizzards could prevent him from attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.

One Sunday the doubting priest was saying Mass alone, because a frightful wind-driven blizzard had kept the parishoners in their homes. The priest had consecrated the communion wafers and the wine in the chalice when he heard someone enter the church.

The priest looked with great surprise, murmuring: "Poor man, coming from so far and in such terrible weather that he risked dying on the way, only to kneel before a little bread and wine."

But then something strange came over the priest. He looked at the paten and saw, horrified, that the communion wafer was reddening, becoming bloody flesh which appeared to have been recently cut from a living body, and the wine in the chalice thickened, acquiring a darker tone, and smelled of blood.

The priest fell to his knees before the altar, and then fell to the floor, unconscious. The parishoner who had just arrived ran to the altar and attempted to revive the priest, but he was dead. The relics of this miracle are preserved to this day in the church of Pedrafitas do Cebreiro.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Las Leyendas Tradicionales Gallegas*, Leandro Carre Alvarellos, Madrid, 1977, pp. 110-111.

The parallels of the above legend with other materials concerning the Holy Grail are so obvious that no commentary is necessary.

The Holy Grail Tradition in Shi'a Islam

The Holy Grail plays an important role in Shi'a Islam, both Imami or Twelver and Ismaili.⁶¹ For those unfamiliar with Shi'ism, I refer the reader to the basic bibliography on the subject given at the beginning of the chapter of "Shi'a Festivals", as well as to works listed in the notes in various other chapters of the present work.

Prominent in Shi'ism is the concept of what is called *futuwwat* in Arabic, *javanmardi* in Persian, which may be translated as "spiritual chivalry". The *futuwwat* or *javanmardi* initiation includes a "ritual of the cup" which was established by the Prophet Muhammad (on whom be peace). After proclaiming Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (the First Imam) as the "knight of the community", Muhammad called for a cup of water and salt. He then mixed three pinches of salt into the water. After putting the first pinch into the cup, he said: "This is the *shari'at* (law)." After the second he said: "This is the *tariqat* (mystical path)," and after the third he said: "This is the *haqiqat* (mystical self-realization)."

There is also a triple classification of knights: i.e., (1, Knights of the word (*qawli*), (2) Knights of the sword (*sayfi*), and (3) Knights of the mystical cup (or Holy Grail) (*shurbi*).

Once again the "triad", of which we have seen so many examples throughout this work.⁶²

⁶¹ Most of the information on this topic is from *The Voyage and the Messenger* by Henry Corbin, essay "A Shi'ite Liturgy of the Grail", pp. 173, 204, Berkeley, California, 1998.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

There is also another tradition which says that in pre-Islamic Arabia there existed a chivalric order (*futuwwat-dari*) whose rites included a cup of wine. Later forty of the companions of Muhammad requested that he institute a *futuwwat* which would include the ritual of the cup. This Muhammad did, though eliminating the use of wine,⁶³ continued the use of salted water.

The above forcefully reminds us of the Celtic, Persian and specifically Christian examples of the "sacred cup" or "Holy Grail" which we have mentioned above, and also of the "cup" or "krater" so prominent in the Mithraism once so prevalent in the Roman Empire.⁶⁴ In the *Nusayri* calendar of Shi'a festivals there are two (*Now Ruz* and *Mehrgan*) which are of Zoroastrian origin and two "Christmas and Holy Thursday) whose precedence is Christian. At this, some will begin to cry "syncretism". However, one whose mind is not poisoned by Nominalism and/or Protestantism or Wahhabism will agree with Henry Corbin: "From the Gnostics' (initiate's) own point of view, the recognition of other lamps which are lighted in the same way (*or from the same Source*) is of an order of thought which is the opposite of this so-called syncretism."⁶⁵

One is reminded that the early Celtic monks used the same tonsure as the Druids, and that St. Patrick borrowed two Druidic symbols – the shamrock and the Celtic Cross – and put them to Christian use.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶⁴ *The Mysteries of Mithra*, Franz Cumont, New York, 1856, p. 158. *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, David Ulansey, Oxford, 1898, pp. 10, 15, 20, 24, 51, 55.

⁶⁵ Corbin, *The Voyage ...*, pp. 175-176.

In order to comprehend the ritual of the Cup or Holy Grail described above, we must delve into the doctrines of a somewhat mysterious and ultimately tragic figure, Abu'l Khattab. His full name was Abu'l Khattab Muhammad ibn Abi Zaynab Miqlas al-Asadi. Abu'l Khattab was a close friend of Ja'far as-Sadiq, the Sixth Imam. The high esteem in which Abu'l Khattab was held by Imam Ja'far is indicated by the following words of the Imam: "Remember and never forget! You know that which is hidden, you have now become the treasure-chest of my knowledge and the dwelling-place of my secret. Unto you I entrust our living and our dead."⁶⁶

Later Abu'l Khattab was disavowed by Imam Ja'far, and was martyred by the Abassid Caliph Isa ibn Musa. However, everything indicates that said disavowal was by mutual consent, Abu'l Khattab sacrificing his own life for the sake of the Shi'a community, Imam Ja'far consenting only with the most extreme reluctance and personal agony. This is amply proven by the fact that afterwards Imam Ja'far could not speak of Abu'l Khattab without tears in his eyes, and several times admitted that his grief and anguish over his disavowal of Abu'l Khattab and Abu'l Khattab's martyrdom were inconsolable. Imam Ja'far cited the companions of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the First Imam: "We remember the friendship which united and the trials which they suffered. We are also stirred with compassion for them."

⁶⁶ *Kitab ma'rifat akhbar ar-rijal*, al-Kashi, Bombay, 1317 AH, p. 187. I have not found this saying of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq in *Al-Kafi*, the monumental collection of the sayings of the Imams compiled by al-Kulayni, but then I do not have access to the whole of said work, nor, monumental though it is, no guarantee exists that all of the known sayings of the Imams are included in al-Kulayni's work. Cited by Henry Corbin in *The Voyage ...*, p. 178.

Imam Ja'far commented on the above: "This is permitted."⁶⁷

The theology of Abu'l Khattab is radically apophatic (the *via negativa* of Christian Mysticism), as is true of other Shi'a schools. The Absolute Divinity is radically incomprehensible, ineffable, and can never really be defined by any name or attribute. Yet from God emanates the Name (*Ism*) and the Meaning (*Ma'na*), which are manifested in each cycle by a group of five theophanic figures. These cycles are called "domes". This term is indeed striking, because a dome, while spatial, is not a temporal figure. This indicates that said cycles are, in reality, beyond time, in the "Eternal Now" of the mystics of all religious traditions. Friedrich Nietzsche, often considered to have been an atheist (though he himself would **not** have agreed) and in any case not a student of mysticism, intuited this in his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

One!

O man! Attend!

Two!

What does midnight's voice contend?

Three!

'I slept my sleep,

Four!

And now awake at dreaming's end:

Five!

The world is deep,

⁶⁷ Al-Kashi, op. cit., p. 189. Cited by Henry Corbin in *Ibid.*, p. 180.

Six!

Deeper than the day can comprehend.

Seven!

Deep is its woe,

Eight!

Joy – deeper than even the heart's agony:

Nine!

Woe says: fade! Go!

Ten!

But all joy wants Eternity,

Eleven!

Wants deep, deep, deep Eternity!

Twelve!

For I love you, O Eternity!'

Thus, the passage from dome to dome is **not** a temporal progression, but the work of a single transcendent Light

In the Shi'a doctrine of Prophets and Imams, one certainly finds parallels with the *Verus Propheta* (True Prophet) of the homilies of St. Clement of Alexandria, whose final manifestation is Jesus. Of course, to a Muslim, Shi'a or Sunni, the Seal of the Prophets is not Jesus but Muhammad, and Shi'ism adds a cycle of spiritual initiation following the Cycle of Prophecy, the Cycle of *Walayat* (Friends of God) whose Seal is the Imamate. This commenced with the Dome of Moses, the Domes of Persia, and, finally, the Muhammadan Dome. The absence of a "Dome of Jesus" is very difficult to explain; that a Shi'a would either deliberately or inadvertently do anything

which might slight Jesus is simply unthinkable. It has been suggested that the "Dome of Jesus" was "absorbed into the Persian Domes, which is not completely far-fetched; as we shall see, there are many Christian as well as Persian Shi'a sources which affirm that Jesus was heir to Zoroaster as well as to the Old Testament Prophets. I have heard of a society, apparently very ancient, called "Brotherhood of the Lamb", one of whose tenets is that Jesus was of Persian rather than Jewish ancestry. At the moment I have no bibliography concerning said esoteric society.

The Persian Dome is really four domes in one, and is called the "Bahmanian Dome" rather than the "Zoroastrian Dome" or "Mazdean Dome". *Bahman* is the Pahlavi and Persian form of the Avestan "*Vohu Manah*", the first of the six Zoroastrian archangels or *Amesha Spenta*. *Vohu Manah* literally means "Good Mind", and it symbolizes the wisdom of Ahura Mazda.⁶⁸

Each of the four Persian domes has its own name. The first is the "Major Bahmanian Dome", composed of Gayomart (the Zoroastrian Adam), Tahmuras (of whom we shall have more to say), Bahman (*Vohu Manah*), Hormoz (Ormazd, Ahura Mazda), Jamshid and others. The second Persian Dome is the "Sublime Bahmanian Dome", whose leading figure is Zadan Shah, Kay Qobad, Kay Ka'us, Kay Khusraw, Kay Lohrasp and Goshtasp (Avestan "*Vish-taspa*", protector of Zoroaster.

The third Persian dome is the "Red Bahmanian Dome", "which contains an explanation and an esoteric secret (*sirr*)". We shall have a great deal more to say concerning this "Red Bahmanian Dome". The figures of said dome are Sohrab, Hushang (Avestan: *Haoshyangha*), the

⁶⁸ *History of Zoroastrianism*, Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla, Bombay, 1985, pp. 41-46, 359-363.

first king of the mythological Pishdadi dynasty, conqueror of demons (Avestan *daeva*, Pahlavi and Persian *div*), and fairies (Avestan *pairika*, Pahlavi and Persian *peri*).⁶⁹ The others of this dome are figures from pre-Islamic Persian history. Sohrab is familiar to all readers of the *Shah Namah* of Firdausi.

The Fourth Persian Dome is the "White Bahmanian Dome", whose figures are Esfandiyar (great hero of Zoroastrianism),⁷⁰ Hormoz and Ardashir, founder of the Sassanian Dynasty.

Most interesting is the passing from the Persian domes to the Muhammadan Dome, which is explained by an exegesis of Qur'an LIV:6: "The day when the Caller shall call them to a difficult thing."

This is the day of the Manifestation of Salman the Persian:

In his right hand he holds a Holy Grail (*ka's*, i.e., cup, chalice or krater) in which is found the servant of the Light (the Wine of Malakut, of which we shall have more to say). In his left hand he holds an '*oud* (lute). He calls the people to the Prophecy Muhammad and thus brings about their conversion to Islam (this being the "difficult thing"). Previously, one had appeared (Zoroaster) who had called them to the Magian (or Bahmanian) religion....Then the Prophet Muhammad appeared, who called them to know and recognize him. But the people were confused because of the difference between the two languages (Persian and Ara-

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 264, 276. *Shah Namah-i-Firdausi*, Teheran, 1965, Volume I, pp. 19-21.

⁷⁰ *Zoroastrian Civilization*, Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla, Oxford, 1922, pp. 16, 88, 92. *Shah Namah-i-Firdausi*, Teheran, 1965, Volume 5, pp. 3-10.

bic) and two theophanies: Bahmanian and Muhammad. When Mawlana the Emir of the Bees (Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib; "bees" is sometimes used to mean the stars in the sky) then became manifest, who is *Ma'na* (hidden meaning and the object of their devotion (*ma'bud*). He was seen holding the *Dhu'l-Fiqar* (the wondrous sword) in his hand. Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) then told them: "Here is he who is your lord and companion, 'Ali-al-Kabir ('Ali the Great)."⁷¹

One could hardly express more clearly the idea that it is through the Imams – i.e., Shi'ism, that the conflict between Zoroastrianism and Islam is overcome, thus achieving the passage from the Bahmanian Dome to the Muhammadan Dome, in other words, the conversion from Zoroastrianism to Islam. Note that this is from early Shi'a sources, **not** the theory of a Western scholar. Of course, Sufism should perhaps be added to Shi'ism in this case, but then Haydar Amoli said that Shi'ism is Sufism and Sufism is Shi'ism.

Now comes, from our present viewpoint, what may be the most interesting part of the ceremony. The Holy Grail cup, chalice or krater is passed from hand to hand. Each participant drinks his fill, yet the level of the liquid in the cup does not diminish. The same occurs with the Holy Grail in the West; each knight receives his fill, with no decrease in the content of the Grail. We shall have more to say of this later.

⁷¹ Esoterische Sonderheiten bei dem Nusairi, Geschichten und Traditionem von den heiligen Meistern aus dem Prophetenhaus, R. Strothmann, Berlin, 1958, p. 292.. Cited by Henry Corbin in *The Voyage ...*, pp. 189-190.

Now Abu'l Khattab raises his arm in the gesture of a Catholic or Eastern Orthodox priest at the moment of Consecration, and makes a circle in the air. The cup then slowly rises from his hand, floating in a red dome (once again, we shall have more to say of this), which then opens around it and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq appears in its light. Surrounded by the "blaze of the Holy Grail" Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq reveals the mystery of the "Wine of Malakut" ("Wine of the World of Angels"). The visionary moment is completed by the descent of the Holy Grail. However, now it is empty: all of the Invisible Ones of the other domes have also been participating in the rite; all are present in the "Eternal Now".

Abu'l Khattab explains that the Holy Grail is the cup of Tahmuras (of whom we shall have more to say). Tahmuras was, under the Bahmanian Dome, the "hair of the Beast", homologue of the Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Abu'l Khattab is the homologue of Hoemoz. This is not reincarnation, it is the "Eternal Now".

In the Shi'a ritual of the Day of Ghadir Khumm, the day of the investiture of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib by the Prophet Muhammad, a large cup is filled, all hold their hands up to God, and the cup is passed from one participant to another.⁷²

We now present the text of the liturgy, or, in another phrase coined by Henry Corbin, the "visionary recital" of the Wine of Malakut. At times we will digress to further explain and elucidate things which have been hinted at but not clearly defined. While some may say this should have been done earlier, I believe that the elucidation will be

⁷² *Festkalender der Nusairer (Majmu al-A'yad)*, translated to German by R. Strothmann, Berlin, 1946. Cited by Henry Corbin in *The Voyage* ..., p. 193.

clearer in the light of what we have said above.⁷³ Abdu'llah al-Barqi reports the words of al-Bythura'i (an otherwise unknown personage):

Muhammad ibn Sinan told me the following, which he heard from Abu Harun the Blind, who told him:

"I had gone to visit Muhammad ibn Abi Zaynab (Abu'l Khattab), the father of good people and good things, may he be revered! Seventy men were present, come from different countries. Among them was Musa ibn Ashyam (later to be) a martyr. ...

There was lengthy discourse among them. Finally, Abu'l Khattab said to them: 'O companions! Do you desire the drink?'

Al-Kh: The drink (wine) of the Malakut (Wine of the Angelic Realm or Mundud Imaginalis).

We: You have nourished us through your knowledge of the Malakut; now give us to drink our fill of the brew.

Al-Kh: The wine of the Malakut is for you; the wine of the gates of Hell (*Bahut*) is for others.

We: And what is the wine of the Bahut?

Al-Kh: The blood of Iblis (Ahriman, the Zoroastrian Satan, or Satan), may God condemn him! But the drink (wine) of the Malakut is the pure beverage which God has described as the drink of the friends (li-awliya'ih) in Paradise. (Abu'l Khattab recites Qur'an XLVII:15) "Rivers of wine, and delights for those who drink of it." Therefore, drink of it in perfect knowledge and in total truth.

⁷³ *Esoterische Sonderheiten*..., R. Strothmann, pp. 207-216, (Arabic text). Cited by Henry Corbin in *The Voyage* ..., pp. 194-204.

We: Then give us to drink our fill, in perfect knowledge and in total truth.

Then he (Abu'l Khattab) called out: "O young girl!" She quickly arrived, and he told her: "Bring the drink for the bodies of earthly men." She brought a wineskin filled with a brilliant radiance and a cup which shone with the golden light of dawn. Then he said: "It is with this that God gratifies His friends." Then he set the cup down and recited: "You shall feel neither intoxication nor headache from it." (Qur'an LVI:18-19: "With goblets and ewers and a cup of pure drink, their heads ache not from it nor do they become intoxicated.")

Then Abu'l Khattab said to Musa ibn Ashyam: "Begin! Let your brothers drink their fill. And when the drink has passed to all, then by this cup you hold in your hand, your bodies shall be filled for all the periods and cycles to come. For you belong to the Holy of Holies (*quds al-muqaddasin*), and you were of the Bahmanians (see above), among the number of the most excellent and noble of them. I have displayed the world for them, and filled them with its delights. I fulfill you with its magnificence, and by my power. give you what I have given no other."

Musa ibn Ashyam stood up and said: "O my lord! From your hand give me a drink which shall satisfy the thirst of him who drinks his fill of it, throughout the centuries of centuries and the eternity of eternities."

Abu Harun the Blind continues his recital: "Then Abu'l Khattab poured the wine into the cup (Grail). He presented (*Nawala-hu*, a term which in Arabic Christian liturgy means "Giving Holy Communion" to someone) the cup (Grail) to Musa, and Musa drank from it and was satisfied. Abu'l Khattab then told

him: "Now give the cup to your brother, Abu Isma'il. He then drank until his own thirst was satisfied, without any decrease in the contents of the cup. All thus drank their fill in turn. Finally, having circulated among all present, the cup returned, exactly as full as it was at the beginning.

We now interrupt the visionary recital to elucidate a crucial point. In its aspect as the Source of Life, the above is also a characteristic of the Holy Grail of the West. As *La Queste del Sant-Graal* says: "Four days more Lancelot tarried (in the castle of *Corbenyc*), which caused the king great joy, for he had long desired to have him (Lancelot) with him. But on the fifth day when they were seated at dinner it befell that the Holy Grail had filled the tables so marvelously that no one could imagine a more bounteous provision."⁷⁴

The name *Corbenyc* is interesting. *Corbenyc* is said to mean "Most Holy Vessel", and has a Celtic etymology. "Blessed Horn" is "*Corn Beannacht*" in Gaelic, and "*Cor Benic*" or "*Cor Benyc*" in Welsh and Breton. "Cor Benic" or "Cor Benyc" passed to Old French or *Langue d'Oil* as *Cor Benit*.

As the Celtic epics indicate, the horn was the most common drinking vessel among the ancient Celts, hence 'horn' became the general term for any drinking vessel, no matter what its shape or what may be the material from which it is made, much as in English and Spanish any drinking vessel is likely to be called a "glass" or *cristal*

⁷⁴ *La Queste del Sant-Graal*, Anonymous, thirteenth century, translated from the Old French by William Wistar Comfort, London, 1926, p. 209.

(Spanish), though it be made of horn, ceramic, plastic, wood, metal, waxed paper or styrofoam.⁷⁵

We now return to the visionary recital.

Then Abu'l Khattab held the cup (Grail) up, moving it around in a circle. As he traced the form of the circle, we regarded it intently: then the cup elevated, rising little by little, floating in space, until it came to its resting place. At this moment, we beheld the Lord (*al-Sayyid*, the Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq) looking upon us from the heights of this space. He was underneath a red dome, built from a unique pearl, whose light shone from the East to the West. The air was filled with a perfume of musk.

... Below are the sayings (*hadith*) of the Shi'a Imams concerning the Throne of Mercy. Note especially how 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the First Imam, associates each of the four pillars of the Throne of Mercy with a particular color:

Al-Jathaliq (*Katholikos*, Patriarch of the Armenian Church) inquired from Amir al-Muminin ('Ali ibn Abi Talib): "Inform me whether Allah, the Almighty, to whom belongs Might and Majesty, lifts the Throne (*of Mercy*) or the Throne lifts Him?"

'Ali ibn Abi Talib replied:

"It is Allah, to Whom belongs Might and Majesty, Who lifts the Throne, the heavens, the earth and all that is in and between them. And it is what Allah, to Whom belongs Might and Majesty, Himself says: 'Truly, Allah holds the heavens and earth, lest they remove; should they remove, none would hold them after Him. Surely He is All clement, All forgiving' (Qur'an XXV:41)."

Then he (the Patriarch) said: "Inform me about His (*Allah's*) words, 'And upon that day eight shall

⁷⁵ Loomis, op. cit., p. 235.

carry above them the Throne of your Lord' (Qur'an LXIX:17). How has Allah said so when you have said that Allah lifts the Throne, the heavens and the earth."

'Ali ibn Abi Talib replied: "Truly the Throne has been created by Allah, the Sublime, out of four categories of light: There is the red light from which the red color derived its redness. There is the green light from which the color green has derived its greenness. There is the yellow light from which the yellow color has derived its yellowness, and there is the white light from which the white color derived its whiteness. It (the Throne or white light) is the knowledge which has been imparted by Allah to those who hear it. And this (knowledge) is the light from and out of His Majesty. Thus, through His Majesty and Light, Allah made the hearts of the believers realize Him. And because of Allah's Majesty and Light, the ignorant turned hostile to Him. And also because of His Majesty and Light, all the creatures, whether in the heavens or the earth, seek the means for an approach to Him (Allah), through various acts (of obedience) and through religions that they are allied to. Thus, everything that has been lifted, Allah lifts it through His Light, His Majesty and His Power. These things have no power to hurt nor profit themselves, not power of death or life, or rising up. Hence everything is lifted (by Allah). Allah, the Almighty, the Exalted, is He Who holds the heavens and the earth lest they remove, and it is He Who encompasses them and everything, and it is He Who is the Life and the Light of everything. 'Glory be to Him! High indeed be He exalted above what they say'(Qur'an XVII:43).

He (the Patriarch) asked him ('Ali ibn Abi Talib), "Tell me where is Allah, the Almighty, the Great?"

'Ali ibn Abi Talib replied: "He (*Allah*) says: 'He (Allah) is here, there, above, beneath, around and with us.' This is what He (Allah) says: 'Three men conspire

not secretly together, but He is the fourth of them, neither five men, but He is the sixth of them, neither fewer than that, but He is with them, wherever they may be' (Qur'an LVIII:7).

"Thus the Throne (the comprehensive seat of His Authority and Knowledge) encompasses all the heavens and the earth and whatever is between the two, and what is beneath the lowest of the low, below the earth. 'And be you loud in your speech, yet surely He knows the secret and that yet more hidden' (Qur'an XX:7).

"This is what these words of Allah, the Sublime mean: 'His chair comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them tires him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious' (Qur'an II:255). Those who bear the Throne of Supreme Authority are the learned scholars upon whom Allah has bestowed His Knowledge. Out of these four things (the Throne, the Chair, the heavens and the earth) there is nothing of that which Allah has created in His Kingdom, which He has shown to His chosen ones and which He showed to His friend (Abraham) as He says: 'So We showed Abraham the Kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith' (Qur'an VI:75).

"How can the bearers of the Throne bear Allah (Himself) while their hearts are alive through the life (bestowed by Allah) and through Divine Light they are guided to know Him?"⁷⁶

Abu Qurrah went in to the Imam ('Ali al-Ridha ... 'Ali Reza, the Eighth Imam) and inquired about the lawful and unlawful. Then, he said to him (the Imam), "Do you admit that Allah is (in a state of) being carried?"

Al-Kafi, by Ash-Shaykh Abu Ja'afar Muhammad ibn Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kulayni ar-Razi, translated by Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Rizvi, Teheran, 1980, Volume One, pp. 321-325.

The Imam replied: "Everything carried is (passive), i.e., acted upon by someone else, and in need (of others). The word "carried" in itself connotes deficiency and need. On the other hand, the carrier is (active) i.e., the one who acts. The word "carrier" signifies analogy within itself, just as the words above, below, the very high and the very low are generally used by speakers. Allah has also said, 'And to Allah (alone) belongs (all) the most beautiful names, so call Him by them'(Qur'an VII:180).

"And He has never said in His book (the Qur'an) that He has been carried. Rather, He has said that He carries on land and sea. 'We have honored the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea' (Qur'an XVII:70). 'And it is He Who holds the heavens and earth lest they remove'(Qur'an XXXV:41).

"And everything which is carried is always apart from Allah. It has never been heard that anyone who believes in Allah and His Majesty called Him (Allah) "O the carried."

Abu Qurrah inquired: "Allah Himself said: 'And the angels shall stand upon its borders and upon that day eight shall carry above them the Throne of your Lord' (Qur'an LXIX:17).

"And regarding the verse: 'Those who bear the Throne and those round about it, proclaim the praise of their Lord, and believe in Him, and they ask forgiveness for those who believe: O Lord, You embrace everything in mercy and knowledge; therefore forgive those who have repented and follow Your Way, and guard them against the chastisement of Hell, Our Lord, and admit them to Gardens of Eden that You have promised them and those who were righteous of their fathers, and their wives, and their seed; surely You are the All-mighty , the All-wise...' (Qur'an XL:7-9)."

The Imam replied: "The Throne by itself is not Allah. The Throne is the name (having two meanings,

one of which is) His Knowledge and (the other) His Might, which includes each and every thing with it. Further, Allah has attributed the bearing (of His Throne) to some among His creatures who are other than He Himself. Since through the bearing of the Throne Allah has made His creatures worship Him. The bearers of the Throne are those who are the bearers of His Knowledge and those creatures who glorify Him around His Throne (i.e., the second meaning). They act according to their knowledge. They include the angels who record the doings of mankind. Allah has made the inhabitants of the earth worship Him by their circumambulating His House (the Ka'abah). And Allah sat Himself upon the Throne as He Himself said (Qur'an XX:5). Allah holds and protects the Throne, its bearers and all that is around His Throne. Allah is the One Who holds them and sustains them and every sentient being. He is over and above all these things, and fully prevails over them. He cannot be regarded as carried or (as being) underneath anything. These words are quite improper, having no (logical) basis. Such words are wicked both in their letter and their spirit."

At this point Abu Qurrah said: "Do you falsify the tradition narrated (to us) which says, "Truly when Allah becomes angry His wrath is known through (the increased) weight (which the angels feel) on their shoulders while carrying the Throne. (At that moment) the angels forthwith lie in prostration. When (Allah's) wrath subsides, the weight of the Throne lightens, and the angels return to their former position."

Hearing this, the Imam 'Ali Reza said: "Tell me, whether Allah, the Blessed, the Sublime, has or has not been wrathful over since He cursed Iblis (Satan), and tell me when He became pleased with Iblis. (No doubt) Allah has ever since been wrathful over Iblis, his friends and followers. Therefore, the angels, who carry the Throne, must be lying in prostration till now! Further,

how do you dare to associate with Allah the attribute of changing from mood to mood and state to state. And how do you dare to imply to Him (the Creator) what is applicable to the created while Allah is glorified and too high above this? Allah has never perished along with changes, and never alters along with things that alter. Everything beside He Himself is fully in His hold and at His disposal. All are in need of Him but He (Allah), besides Himself, is in need of nothing at all.”⁷⁷

Said Fudayl ibn Yasar: “I inquired of Imam Ja‘far (Ja‘far as-Sadiq, the sixth Imam) regarding the verse of (Allah) the Almighty, the Great: ‘His Chair comprises the heavens and earth’(Qur’an II:255).

The Imam replied: “O Fudayl, all things, the heavens and the earth, are all within the Chair.”⁷⁸

Said Zurarah ibn Ayan: “I inquired of Imam Ja‘far (Ja‘far as-Sadiq, the Sixth Imam) regarding the words of Allah, the Almighty, the Great, ‘His Chair comprises the heavens and earth’; ‘Do the heavens and earth include the Chair, or does the Chair include the heavens and earth?’

The Imam said: “It is the Chair which comprises the heavens, the Earth and the Throne. The Chair (also) includes every (other) thing.”⁷⁹

Said Abi Hamza: Said Imam Ja‘far (the Sixth Imam): “The bearers of the Throne – the Throne is knowledge – are eight. Four are from amongst us (the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad), and four are from those amongst those whom Allah wished.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 325-328.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 328.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 329.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 329-330.

Said Dawud ar-Riqqi: "I inquired of Imam Ja'far (the Sixth Imam) regarding the following words of Allah, the Almighty, the Great: 'And His Throne was upon the water'(Qur'an XI:7)."

The Imam inquired, "What do people say about it?"

I replied: "People say that the Throne was upon the water and Allah was on the Throne."

The Imam said: "They are liars. He who thinks thusly has made Allah (transportable), someone carried, and (in this way) has ascribed to Him the attributes of the created. Further, this proves as a necessity that what bears and lifts Allah must be stronger than Allah Himself."

I requested the Imam, "May I be made your ransom! Kindly enlighten me on this point."

The Imam said: "Truly, Allah, prior to creating the heavens and earth, the jinn, mankind, the sun and the moon put His Religion and Knowledge on the water. When Allah intended to create the creatures, He spread them all before Him and questioned them, 'Who is your Lord?'

The first and foremost who replied (to this question) were the Messenger of Allah (the Prophet Muhammad), Amir al-Muminin ('Ali ibn Abi Talib) and the other Imams. They said, "You are our Lord."

At this, Allah made them bear witness to His Knowledge and Religion and addressed the angels, "Those are the bearers of My Religion and My Knowledge, and are My custodians over My creatures, and these are the people who will be called upon to give account."

Then Allah addressed the sons of Adam (mankind): "Acknowledge the Lordship of Allah and the rulership of these people and their obedience."

Mankind replied: "Yes, our Lord, we do acknowledge."

Then Allah addressed the angels: "Be witnesses (to them)."

At this the angels affirmed saying: "We are witnesses to them, so that they may not deny tomorrow and say: 'As for us, we were heedless of this' (Qur'an VII:172)."

Or they may say: "Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we are seed after them. What, will you then destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?" (Qur'an VII:173.

Said the Imam: "O Dawud, Our rule is highly stressed to them in the pledge."⁸¹

We now refer to a work called *Book of the Red Hyacinth*, the word "hyacinth" referring to a precious stone, not to the familiar flower of the same name. This book was written in the middle of the nineteenth century by Shaykh Muhammad Karim-Khan Kirmani, a disciple of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i, founder of the Shaykhi School of Iranian Shi'a philosophy.

As we said earlier, there are no more implacable enemies of the intellectual poison, the pernicious nonsense known as "Nominalism" than the Shi'a philosophers of Iran. Let this be to the great honor of said philosophers and to Shi'ism.

Qur'an XV:21 says: "There are no things whose treasures (khaza'in) do not exist alongside us. We make them descend only in determined proportions."

For the Shi'a thinkers of Iran, the "treasures" mentioned above are the "archetypes" or "Platonic forms". All spatio-

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 330-331.

temporal phenomena are the result of a "descent of archetypes" or "descent of Platonic forms" from superior worlds.⁸²

At this time it might be wise to explain the concept of *ta'wil*, much used by Shaykh Muhammad Kirmani, who defines it as: "Consisting in referring the literal appearance back to one of the archetypes or Platonic forms (*khaza'in* in any case)[or in exchanging the literal value for one of the treasures of the archetypes or Platonic forms]."⁸³

We shall have occasion to return to the concept of *ta'wil*. The first part of *Book of the Red Hyacinth* is a long treatise on qualitative physics. This last may sound like an oxymoron to many people, to whom "physics" in quantitative by definition. Rene Guenon would call this another example which proves that today we live in the "reign of quantity", while to the poet William Blake it is "single vision and (Isaac) Newton's sleep." E. A. Burtt, Aldous Huxley and Seyyed Hossein Nasr among others have described how everything not amenable to mathematical treatment was arbitrarily excluded from the scientific world view.

The scientific world view may be correct as far as goes, but it has its limitations and deals only with a part of reality, probably a small part. Even logical positivists, such as Ayer, have now admitted that they were in error.

We now proceed with those parts of *Book of the Red Hyacinth* which deal specifically with the color red.

Firstly, there is the *ta'wil* of the exoteric dimension of the color red. Recall the words of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib saying that red is the color of the lower left hand pillar of the

⁸² *Temple and Contemplation*, Henry Corbin, London, 1986, essay "The Realism and Symbolism of Colours in Shi'ite Cosmology", p. 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 38. As *Book of the Red Hyacinth* is unedited, Henry Corbin's essay is virtually the only source available concerning it.

Throne of Mercy, and that it is from this pillar that “the color red gets its redness”. Thus, said pillar is the archetype from which the color red descends into the spatio-temporal world. Also, this fourth pillar of the Throne of Mercy is typified by the Archangel Gabriel, and is Nature, comprised of four modalities: Fire (red), which is the very nature of being; Air (yellow), which is its exemplary image; Water (white), which is matter; and Earth (black), which is its body. The descending order of the elements, Fire, Air, Water, Earth, is reversed in the spatio-temporal world, which ascends from Earth to Fire. According to a parable or analogy, when the Creator produced a red hyacinth (hence the title of Shaykh Kirmani’s work), He contemplated it with admiration, and the red hyacinth melted into water (the reciprocity of Fire and Water; as any chemistry student knows, the burning of hydrogen produces water, hence the reciprocity of Fire and Water is true in both qualitative and quantitative physics). Out of the foam of this Water God created the Earth; out of its vapor He created Heaven. Shaykh Kirmani explains that the red hyacinth typifies Nature: it becomes Water which is Nature’s matter; Heaven, which is the world of archetypes or Platonic forms (called, in a phrase coined by Henry Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis*), is created from its subtle vapor, while Earth is turned into telluric mass, which is the world of bodies. Thus, the symbol of the red hyacinth, which includes the totality of the four fundamental modalities.⁸⁴

We now come to the esoteric dimension of the color red. This takes us from the Throne of Mercy to the Throne of the *Walayah* (*dusti* in Persian), which literally means “Friendship”, or, by extension, “attachment”, and refers to the Twelve Imams. It is the *walayah* or *dusti* of the Imams which

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

transforms the Religion of Law to the Religion of Love. The Christian resonances are obvious.

The correspondence between the Throne of Mercy and the Throne of Walayah is perfect. The pillar of white light of the Throne of Walayah is the Twelfth Imam, the "Hidden Imam". As he is the last Imam, he is at the apex of the "upper right-hand pillar" of the Throne of Walayah.

The lower right-hand pillar of yellow light is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the First Imam. The upper left-hand pillar of green light represents Hasan ibn 'Ali, the Second Imam. The lower left-hand pillar of red light represents Hussein ibn 'Ali, the Third Imam, made "Prince of Martyrs" by the tragedy of Karbala.

The throne of the Walayah of the Imams is the esoteric dimension of the Throne of Mercy. The fourth pillar, made red by the light of the martyred Imam Hussein, is the esoteric dimension of the fourth pillar of the Throne of Mercy, which is Nature, represented by the color red.

Shaykh Kirmani recounts a beautiful legend which says that on a feast day Imam Hasan and Imam Hussein, then children, asked the Prophet Muhammad, their grandfather, to give them a garment as a gift, and two white robes dropped down from Heaven. Hasan and Hussein then declared that they would prefer it if the two robes were dyed the colors they wished. Hasan asked for his robe to be dyed green as an emerald, but Hussein said that he wanted his robe to be the color of the red hyacinth. The Archangel Gabriel obliged. The Prophet Muhammad rejoiced, but Gabriel began to weep. When the Prophet asked Gabriel why he was weeping, the archangel replied that Hasan would be poisoned, while Hussein would be assassinated.

Another legend reveals the link between the Archangel Gabriel, the fourth pillar of the red light of the Throne of Mercy, and Imam Hussein, fourth pillar of the red light of the

Throne of Walayah, by saying that the Prophet Muhammad clothed Imam Hussein in a garment woven of the Archangel Gabriel's hair.

Yet another legend expresses the same esoteric knowledge by saying that in Paradise the palace of Imam Hasan is emerald green, while that of Imam Hussein is the color of the red hyacinth.

We now have reached the esoteric dimension of the *ta'wil* of the color red. In the angelic tetrad which supports the Throne of Mercy, it is the Archangel Gabriel who is the angel of Nature, whose color is red. There is a tradition which says: "The red rose is an effusion of the Archangel Gabriel."

How the Irish poet William Butler Yeats would have loved the above tradition, had he known of it! One is reminded of Yeats' saying that the rose is the mystical flower of the West (which in this context most certainly includes Persia) as the lotus is the mystical flower of the East.

Thus, it is obvious that there is a perfect correspondence between the tetrad of theophanic universes, the angelic tetrad of the Throne of Mercy, and the tetrad of the Throne of Walayah, and that in each tetrad there is an anamnesis of the color red.

The esoteric dimension of the *ta'wil* of Nature, typified by the color red, may also be the esoteric knowledge of the sciences of Divine Love, so beloved of the Sufis and many of the Christian mystics. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, the Sixth Imam, speaks of Divine Love as: "Fire that unexpectedly invades the depths of the heart and consumes all that is not the Beloved Object."

One hears echoes of the words of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq in the *Gulistan* of Saadi:

Oh nightingale, learn from the moth to love

That shrivels in the flame without a sigh ...

And, most especially, in "Oh Living Flame of Love" by the sixteenth century Spanish poet and mystic St. John of the Cross:

*O living flame of love
How tenderly you wound
My soul in its deepest center!
Now that You are not hiding
Finish now if You will
Break the thread of this sweet encounter.*

*Oh sweet captivity!
Oh wound that is a gift!
That savors of Eternal Life
And pays all debts
Killing, You have transformed death into life.*

*Oh lamps of fire
In whose brilliance
The deep caverns of the senses
That were dark and blind
With strange
Heat and light give beside the Beloved.*

*What gentle and lovely
Memories in my bosom
Where secretly only You abide
And with Your sweet sighs
Filled with righteousness and glory
With what delicacy You taught me of love!*

We shall have more to say of this in the chapter which deals with St. John of the Cross and Sufism. As we shall see, in a very real sense, St. John of the Cross may be considered a spiritual master in a line begun by Hasan ibn 'Ali, the

Second Imam. It is very true that the sayings of the Imams are a mine of spiritual knowledge!

Now we have come to the *ta'wil* of the exoteric dimension of the color red. The *ta'wil* of the esoteric dimension of the color red was disclosed to us in the person of Imam Hussein. Now, the esoteric dimension of the color red leads us to the *Imam within*, a concept found in the greatest spiritual masters of Persian Shi'ism: Najamuddin Kubra, Mullah Sadra Shirazi and a long et cetera.

According to Shaykh Kirmani, there is an Imam Hussein within each man, his intellect, whose light derives from the Imam. However, this inner Imam is surrounded by enemies, i.e., the powers of the carnal soul that come from the Imam's enemies. So, within every man is reenacted the tragedy of Karbala. As Shaykh Kirmani says: "In the Karbala of his heart, it may be that the powers of the carnal soul kill the intellect and the angelic companions who assist it, and uproot all traces of them from Man's heart. Then indeed there is accomplished in each one of us, word for word, the *ta'wil* of the tragedy of Karbala."⁸⁵

Shaykh Kirmani continues:

While the esoteric dimension of the color red is Imam Hussein, because he died a martyr's death at Karbala, the *ta'wil* of this esoteric dimension is man's intellect, because all intellects derive from the irradiation and the light of this esoteric dimension (i.e., from the Imam), intellects that can be murdered by the carnal soul and its assistants."⁸⁶

Obviously, said assistants of the carnal soul may be the Minions of Yezid (the Umayyad Caliph under whom

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

Imam Hussein was assassinated) or those of Ahriman, Iblis or Satan.

In *La Queste del Sant-Graal*, Percival's aunt, a holy recluse, tells him: "In the same way, I think, the knight whom you ought to regard as master and shepherd (Galahad) came to comfort you. For just as Our Lord (Jesus) came in the appearance of a flame (to His apostles at Pentecost), so the knight came in red armor, in colors like fire."⁸⁷

Anyone familiar with Celtic mythology and folklore knows that in Celtic lore a red cap is a sign of a supernatural being. As we shall see, the rooster or cock was sacred to Celts, Slavs, and, apparently, Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans. This is the origin of the cock as a symbol of France. The rooster or cock certainly wears a "red cap".

The Sufi master Suhrawardi wrote a book titled *The Story of the Red Archangel*, which, I suppose, refers to the Archangel Gabriel. The *Mithras* of the Mithraism prevalent in the Roman Empire is always portrayed wearing a red cap.⁸⁸

The elite cavalry of the early Safavis were known as *qizil bash* in Turkish or *surkh sar* in Persian, in both cases meaning "red heads" because of the red felt caps which they wore over their helmets and the red back cloths which were part of their uniform. Said red felt caps had twelve folds for the Twelve Imams.

There is the *oriflamme*, the red pennant which was one of the banners of medieval France. We must not forget the red beret of the Carlists; the Carlists fight for a branch of

⁸⁷ *La Queste del Sant-Graal*, op. cit., p. 63.

⁸⁸ Ulansey, op. cit., cover photo. *Journal Persian Heritage*, quarterly, essay "From Mithra to Mithras", James R. Russel, Winter, 2001, p. 41.

the Bourbons, and red is **not** a color of the Bourbons, nor is it a color of the Habsburgs to whom the Carlists became attached because the mother of Carlos de Borbon y Austria-Este was a Habsburg. Finally, there are the red vestments of the cardinals, the "Princes of the Catholic Church".

We now return to the visionary cycle.

The lord-companion Imam Ja'far, giver of our salvation, then proclaimed his secret: "O Muhammad (Abu'l Khattab), I quench the thirst of faithful adepts, the pure, the noble, the just, with this drink which I have forbidden to common libertines. I have offered it to my faithful who are present in this world and in the other world. But to the common libertines I have imposed yoke and chains, and have sent them into the desert of those who lose their way."

As for us, we were rapt in contemplation of the beauty and light which radiated from the dome. Then my lord (Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq) spoke to us again:

"I have chosen you, I have attracted you to me, and you have come near by remaining with my Friends. If it had been otherwise, your eyes would have been torn out by the power of this Light, and you would have fainted in terror upon hearing this voice. But I have made it so that this is an honor for you and a disgrace to your adversaries. Therefore, welcome this in recognition, for today is the day of surplus."

And the Imam recited this verse: "For those who do good is excellent reward and more: no darkness (or dust) shall cover their face nor ignominy befall them; these are the dwellers of the garden; in it shall they abide" (Qur'an X:27).

At this moment the cup (Grail) began to once more descend towards us. But this time it was empty, with not a drop remaining. Then Abu'l Khattab said to his companions: "Behold, this cup has circulated through the temples of all the non-Arabs, throughout all

the seven periods of the world, all of them are your brothers in faith and esoteric knowledge. You have drunk with them from this cup, for you are of the number of the Nobles. And I have given you to drink your fill of this beverage today, just as I gave you to drink of it in the times which came before."

Then Abu'l Khattab took the cup, filled it again, and gave it to Musa ibn Ashyam, telling him: "May God give you life, O Friend of the Merciful!"

And Ibrahim, Friend of the Merciful, took the cup in his hands and drank from it.

Then the lord (Abu'l Khattab) said: "May God's drink bring great good to you. By my life! Through this drink, you have tasted the knowledge of the Malakut., the knowledge of all that was in the first of the centuries, and throughout all the world. Henceforth, you may speak any language. Having tasted of this drink, you know the language of the birds, and of all that breathes upon the surface of the earth."

Afterward, Musa ibn Ashyam said: "I bear witness to Him Who created me in harmony! After drinking from this cup, there remained no being nor any thing, neither on earth nor in Heaven, nor anywhere in between, whose language remained hidden to me."

Then Abu'l Khattab had each of us partake of the beverage, and he told us: "Today you are in the house of surplus. Speak then and I shall listen. Supplicate, pray, and welcome any appeals."

We: May this drink be allowable for our absent friends, even as you have allowed it for us.

Al-Kh: This wine is allowed for your brothers, when they are in the company of brothers in faith and in esoteric knowledge. But this wine is forbidden to you and to them, when not in the company of your brothers (in faith and esoteric knowledge). For God has requited your act of drinking your fill and nourishing yourselves

with this beverage, by removing the four basic polluted Natures from you, those which are the cause of blame. Do you know by what grace you have attained to this eminent rank, this sublime and noble degree?

We: By what grace have we then attained it?

Al-Kh: Imagine that one of you had just gone to bed. Having just placed his head upon his pillow, the thought comes to him of one of his brothers who is weaker, and who has been left behind in regards to food, drink, clothing, and does not even possess a mount. This makes him rise from his bed in consternation, so anxious that he goes straight to his brother, and puts his affairs in order as if they were his own. Well, it is by this manner of action that you have been raised to this high degree and eminent rank.

Musa ibn Ashyam: Glory to God! How sublime is the spiritual virtue of this action, both inwardly (esoterically) and outwardly (exoterically).

We now interrupt the narrative to elucidate a point. Tahmuras, Avestan *Takhma Urupi*, is one of the kings of the mythological Pishdadi dynasty. In the Avesta, Tahmuras or Takhma Urupi is known as the “demon binder” and to have ruled over demons (Persian *div*, Avestan *daeua*), fairies (Persian *peri*, Avestan *pairika*) and sorcerers (Persian *jadu*, Avestan *yatu*). Tahmuras of Takhma Urupi is also the binder of Angra Mainyu, the “Demon of Demons”, who dwells with his evil brood in the bowels of the earth to make onslaughts on the world of righteousness.⁸⁹

Under the “Major Bahmanian Dome”, Tahmuras or Takhma Urupi is the equivalent of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, as he is called “Emir of the Bees”. Abu’l Khattab reminds us

⁸⁹ Dhalla, *History of Zoroastrianism*, pp. 261, 264, 276, 281.

of the sacred nature of the name Bahman, since this is the name of the First Archangel (*Amesha Spenta*) who emanated from Ohrmazd (*Ahura Mazda*). Under the First Bahmanian Dome were two figures who bore the names Bahman (Avestan - *Vohu Manah*) and Hormoz (*Ahura Mazda*). One passed the cup to the other just as in the present visionary recital, and by virtue of the law of homology, Abu'l Khattab was then Hormoz: under the Muhammadan Dome, Abu'l Khattab is what Hormoz was under the First Bahmanian Dome.⁹⁰

We now return to the visionary recital.

Al-Kh: This is the cup of Tahmuras. He was the Emir of the Bees under the First Bahmanian Dome. It was he who presented the cup (Grail) to Bahman – and Bahman is the most sacred of names. Bahman passed the cup to Hormoz, and I was Hormoz, whom Bahman bade drink from the cup. I was thereupon filled with knowledge, wisdom and intelligence. This is why I desired that you find solace in this cup. Indeed, what is that which shields the efforts of believers to console each other from the vanities of Iblis (Ahriman, Satan)? They refrain from these vanities with their spiritual brothers, yet they heap them upon their own flesh and blood. Surely they will suffer painful punishment in the other world.

Abu Harun the Blind now concluded: "Then the companions parted in happiness and lightness of heart. Never have I seen such a gathering of such beauty and light as this assembly. We were brought together by the Grace of God, which had descended upon us along with His Benevolence. This is what our lord Abu'l Khattab has brought about especially for us, during the

⁹⁰ Corbin, *The Voyage ...*, p. 203, footnote 60.

ceremony of the Cup (Holy Grail) with the grace that it brings. Glory be to God, Lord of the worlds. This recital is at and end."⁹¹

The resemblances and parallels of the Shi'a Liturgy of the Holy Grail with the Celtic, Persian and specifically Christian manifestations of the Holy Grail should be obvious to all and require no further comment.

The Holy Grail is so vast a topic that I could have written a book on it; in the notes are listed works which the reader interested in this fascinating topic may consult.

The Holy Grail demonstrates elements which Celts and Iranians have in common, parallel developments of these elements, and later Persian elements which fused with the Celtic traditions. Of course, it is not possible always to distinguish what is common to Celts and Iranians from what is a much later Persian influence. When speaking of the epic we will note that the Welsh-Breton *Romance of Tristan and Isolt*, which forms part of the Arthurian Cycle, the Irish *Romance of Deirdre of the Sorrows* and *The Pursuit of Diarmaid* and *Grianne* on the one hand, and the Parthian *Romance of Vis and Ramin* all have the same plot. For chronological reasons, the above must be a case of an element common to Celts and Iranians, or, at the very least, an example of parallel development of common elements. As Ireland had no "Sarmatian connections", in this case Sarmatian influence by way of Sarmatian cavalry stationed in Roman Britain is precluded.

However, the Quest of the Holy Grail and the Arthurian Cycle in general contain elements of undoubtedly Persian origin. In connection with *Guillot* (or *Guilhot*) de Provence

⁹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, this visionary recital is from Corbin, *The Voyage ...*, pp. 194-204.

(or *Proensa*) we have seen how Muslim Spain was one route by which Persian elements reached the Medieval Celtic World. Nevertheless, Muslim Spain cannot have been the only route by which Persian influences reached the Medieval Celtic World and so powerfully influenced the Grail Legend and the Arthurian Cycle in general; what were the other routes I do not pretend to know, and prefer to admit as much rather than promote theories which seem to me to be totally implausible.

Iqbal's Poetry and References to 'Ali and His Family

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Introduction

For century after century, for the preceding almost fourteen hundred years, the memory and the presence of the Imam 'Ali has had an enduring impact on the Muslim community or *ummah*. 'Allamah Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of Muslim India, too was captivated by his personality. In a time and a place far distant from that of 'Ali, Iqbal cherishes and celebrates his legacy. What did 'Ali b. Abi Talib represent for Iqbal? Why was this Western educated, 20th century, "modern" Muslim so attracted to the heritage and legacy of the Imam 'Ali? What was so compelling in the socio-historical and faith aspects of 'Ali, his wife Fatimah, and their children Hasan and Husain to warrant enduring commemoration? What is the message of Iqbal with regard to the enduring validity of the life and activities of 'Ali and the *ahl al-bait*?¹ For the purpose of seeking answers, Iqbal's *Kulliyat* (Collected Works) in Persian and Urdu, were examined.² In order to provide a systematic overview of Iqbal's presentation of 'Ali and his family, key distinctive words and attributes will be selectively dis-

¹ People of the house, a reference to the immediate family of Prophet Muhammad.

² The *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*, published by Shaykh Ghulam 'Ali and sons in Pakistan (5th edition, 1985) is in two volumes, Persian and Urdu.

cussed. The references to 'Ali and his family appear in the context of Iqbal's didactic moral observations and socio-political persuasions.

Amidst the mire of social malaise, political marginalization, and economic dispossession confronted by the Muslims of India and the Persian-speaking world, Iqbal's portrayal of 'Ali is with pride and joy – pride that ethical ideals are validated by him and joy that his legacy becomes a beacon for all to follow. Hence the presentation of the image of 'Ali indicates Iqbal's attitude to life and the operational philosophy he wished to convey to Muslims. It was necessary for Muslims in India and the Persian-speaking realms to wade through the surrounding siege of challenges, similar to the early community during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Iqbal discusses the triumph of the early community in order to inspire action in present times.

'Ali's persona is enveloped thus in the vigor of Iqbal's message. As the poet-philosopher struggled with the formulations of communal priorities, religious articulations of solidarity, socio-cultural rejuvenation, metaphysically nuanced articulations for freedom from the British, he grasped the dynamics of the early Islamic *weltanschauung* to make them his metaphors for justice and truth. In this context, 'Ali became for Iqbal the mirror to reflect his aspirations of a forward looking, energetic and vigorous Muslim ethos in the Indic environment, and by extension Iran and Central Asia. With the excellence of his personal attributes, he indicated for Iqbal the *mard-i mu'min* (truly faithful person) and the *fata* (chivalrous youth) par excellence who was the paradigmatic seeker of the truth and the ardent devotee of the Lord of Existence. With his sincerity of intent and his dynamism in actions, 'Ali personified and embodied pristine Islamic values as presented by the message of Muhammad. He projected qualities of the soul and

the intellect, the *din* and *dunya*, or the spirit and the world, which if followed could provide the felicitous key for self-reliance and dignity in the lives of contemporary Muslims—transporting them out of the quagmire of degraded second-class citizenry to the confidence of meritorious leadership in their socio-political milieu.

Like Jami and other classical Persian poets such as Sana'i and Rumi, Iqbal's veneration and love for 'Ali, transcended socio-cultural and religio-political proclivities and identities. Though belonging to the Sunni persuasion himself, in a semi- autobiographic Urdu poem, titled "Zuhd awr Rindi" (The Ascetic and the Profligate) from the *Bang-i Dara* (The Call of the Caravan), he refers to himself as one who has learnt about 'Ali and is known to have a Shi'ite tendency. In this poem, Iqbal recounts that a *mawlawi* (theological scholar), famous for his Sufi inclinations and respected by all and sundry, inquires about Iqbal's steadfastness to the commands of the *shari'a* and said:

I hear that he does not consider a Hindu to be a kafir; such a belief is due to the effect of his knowledge of philosophy.

In his nature there is also a little Shi'ism; we heard the exaltation of 'Ali in his words. (Iq.Ur.59-60,vv.9-10)³

³ Iqbal's description according to the *mawlawi* continues: He is a bundle of contradictions for he considers music to be valid in worship, defames religion, has no scorn towards those who sell beauty. If there is song for him at night there is prayer at sunrise. His youth is spotless like the dawn. He is acquainted with Sufism and the *shari'a*. His actual reality is not discernable and he may be the originator of some other Islam. To this Iqbal replies that even he himself (Iqbal) is not acquainted with himself (Iqbal). His name also puns here with *iqbal*, fortune.

To energize his community and to eliminate the stance of passive lassitude, Iqbal sought to portray thus the heritage of a Muslim qua Muslim with the paradigmatic example of 'Ali. If Muslims were to find socio-political worth and were to have the moral means to address their depressed situation, they needed an exemplar, a model who could illuminate for them the pathway to personal and communal felicity. Iqbal drew upon the heritage and bequest of 'Ali for his aspiration to make his community move towards self-reliance and gain respect as global citizens.

***Fadila* (Attributes of 'Ali)**

Iqbal presents 'Ali's inherent qualities (*fadila*) in a Persian poem titled: "Secrets of the Names of 'Ali Mur-tada" from the collection *Asrar-i Khudi* (Secrets of the Self). This poem may be seen in the context of the *fadilas* by which the classical medieval poets presented synopses of 'Ali's attributes. Following them, Iqbal defines him as the best Muslim, the pinnacle of faithfulness, and then expresses his own devotion to 'Ali, who becomes his *raison d'être* to strive and to excel. The Prophet too received omens from him and the community gained direction from him. The mysteries associated with his names are known to the wise. 'Ali's attributes are thus celebrated as portents for the felicity of the community:

*'Ali, the first Muslim, king of men; 'Ali, the
treasure of faith for love.*

*I am alive from the love of his family; in the
world I shine as a jewel.*

*I am a narcissus, pleasant to the sight; I wander
as fragrance in his flower-bed.*

*If zamzam⁴ gushes from my dust, it is due to him;
if wine pours from my vine it is due to him.*

*I am dust, but due to his love, I am a mirror; it is
possible to see his tune in my chest.*

*From his mien the Prophet took an omen; the
righteous community derived splendor from his maj-
esty.*

*His commands are the strength of the manifest
religion; the universe accepts the statute of his family.*

*The Messenger of God called him Abu Turab;⁵
God called him yad Allah⁶ in the Umm al-kitab.⁷*

*Everyone who knows the mysteries of life knows
the secrets of the names of 'Ali. (Iq.Pe.47)*

After this splendid encomium, 'Ali's quintessential nature is defined by Iqbal in the context of his names. For instance *turab* or dust is associated with 'Ali's purity, and *karrar* or impetuousness with his orientation to dynamic action:

*The dark dust, whose name is 'body' —the intel-
lect is lamenting from its injustice.*

*Thoughts that reach heaven and measure earth
are from it (intellect); the blind eye and the deaf ear
are from it (body).*

⁴ The celebrated sacred well near the Ka'ba in Mecca.

⁵ Father of Dust, an epithet bestowed on 'Ali by Muhammad.

⁶ *Hand of God*. Qur'an: 48.10. "Those who give allegiance to you (Prophet), indeed give allegiance to God. The Hand of God is over their hands." Here used for 'Ali to refer to his firm adherence to the message of Islam.

⁷ I.e. the Qur'an, which is referred to as the mother (source) of all books.

From intense love, he ('Ali) has in his hand the double edged sword; the hearts of wayfarers were broken by this highway robber.

The lion of God ('Ali) subjugated the dust; he transformed the dark clay into elixir.

Murtada,⁸ from whose sword truth is illuminated, is called Abu Turab because of conquering the terrain of the body.

This man is world-conquering from his karrari (impetuousness); in his essence there is honor from his self-control.

Whosoever has become an Abu Turab in the universe has turned back the sun from the West.⁹

Whosoever tightly fastens the saddle on the mount of the body has sat like a bezel on the seal of felicity.

In this world the splendor of Khaybar is under his ('Ali's) feet; in that world the distribution of Kawthar¹⁰ is in his hand.

With his self-awareness,¹¹ he acts as the hand of God, from his being as the hand of God, he acts as sovereign.

His essence is the door of the city of 'ulum;¹² Hejaz, China and Rum (Byzantine) are under his command.

⁸ Murtada, meaning the favorite, was a popular term to refer to 'Ali by the Prophet.

⁹ Refers to a legend. Once, due to some unavoidable circumstances, the time for prayer was past and 'Ali brought back the sun from the west so he could pray before the day ended. K.Irs. pp. 261-2. Jami too has referred to this tale, Ja.Diw.83,vv.22-3.

¹⁰ A sacred stream of blessed felicity in Heaven.

¹¹ *Khud-agahi*, self-awareness; it is one of the notions that were antithetical to the classical mystical tradition where awareness of God was the operative concept.

You have to become sovereign over your own dust, so that you may drink luminous wine from your own vine.

The religion of the moth is to become dust; for the dust you become water, for such is manliness.

Become like stone, O one with a clay-like fragile body, so that you may become the foundation for the wall of the garden.

From your very own clay make [yourself] a real man; from that man build [yourself] a universe.

If you construct an edifice without walls or windows, from your dust others may make bricks.

O you who are bent from the cruelty of the crooked spheres; your goblet complains of the iniquity of the stone.

Until when will the wailing and complaining and lamentation continue? Until when the constant beating of the chest?

The real meaning of life is concealed in action; the actual law of life is in the joy of generating.
(Iq.Pe.48 to 49, v.5)

Iqbal continues the poem with the image of the ideal man who is ready to challenge his own destiny and endeavors to change it if he is not pleased with it. Iqbal has thus presented 'Ali's attributes in a didactic mode to elucidate his philosophy of action and his message to the community that they should not remain passive in the face of adverse circumstances; rather they should work with energy and sincerity as is the example of 'Ali. The rhapsodic eulogy of 'Ali is therefore best appreciated when analyzed in the context of Iqbal's writing and philosophy. The poem is from the *Asrar-i Khudi*, Secrets of the Self, that echoes

¹² Pl. of 'Ilm "knowledge".

Rumi's *Mathnawi-i Ma'nawi*.¹³ Iqbal chose Rumi as his guide in his quest for understanding theistic mysticism and in endeavoring to discover the place of the "self" in the cosmos. Since his primary aim was to provide inspiration to apathetic Muslims to encourage them to struggle and to acquire socio-political power, he constantly presented old symbols and time-honored familiar images in a revised context.¹⁴ However, his self-imposed task to communicate his philosophy was not facile. Frequently, the new nuances he presented for old terms were diametrically opposed to established views. In this poetical composition, several traditional concepts have been challenged and extended. Iqbal emphasized action in life and suggested that the "self" of one's being was the most important aspect of existence. The word self, *khudi*, had a negative connotation in traditional Persian poetry and philosophy, where it implied selfishness and egotism. Thus poets like 'Attar or Rumi would bid the individual to annihilate the self in order to discover their spiritual potential and the harmony of their existence. But this word is presented by Iqbal with a new context and the meaning is now equivalent to the Self, Personality, Ego; all are terms that are positive in Western philosophy.¹⁵ He contended that the "self" or ego is the epicenter of one's being. The Self is a persistent element in all of existence which is perfected in mankind, whose elevated position with relation to other creatures is due to this eter-

¹³ Sch.GW. pp. 42ff, 60 ff, 353-358.

¹⁴ He also attacked some other personalities such as Hafiz who he proclaimed, "lulled" the people; and Plato was labeled "the leader of the old sheep of idealism." Sch.GW. p. 42.

¹⁵ Sch.GW. p. 42.

nal Self, which does not have a permanent link with the dust of a person's external form.¹⁶

Hence according to these views, 'Ali is represented as the epitome of the *mard-i khud-dar*, the self-reliant man, who is able to create dynamism in his existence and so controls his destiny. The real man (*mard*) subjugates the negative elements in the material world and produces the elixir which enables him to fulfill his potential.¹⁷ Iqbal urges his community, which was politically and socio-culturally disoriented under British colonial rule, not to indulge in mere laments and complaints, but to emulate 'Ali and to lead a life of positive actions. Iqbal was engaged in the struggle to imbue the Muslims of India with the pride and the identity of "nationhood" necessary for them to throw off the yoke of British imperialism. With this emphasis on "action," he sought to portray the original dynamism of the nascent Muslim community and hence to find the remedy for the crisis of apathy in his community. For his message to be effective, it was essential that he provide as inspiration a personality indigenous to Islam, and 'Ali becomes the perfect example.

In addition to casting a new connotation for associating with the word Self (*khudi*), Iqbal argued that the human or man *per se* is God's vicegerent and must strengthen his individual personality so he may fulfill his divine destiny. Islamic revelation again provided him with a valid source for these views. As the vicegerent of God or *khalifah*, mankind occupies a central position in the schema of existence. The "trust" entrusted to the *insan* (human) as mentioned in

¹⁶ Ibid. 113.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 121 ff.

Qur'an (33:72),¹⁸ was interpreted by Iqbal as the burden of individuality, the gift of the conscious intellect. It is this faculty of cognitive thought that enables humanity to be selective and to choose between the differing pathways of right and wrong, justice and tyranny, peace and strife. Further, it is important to remember that a human being is still merely the legatee and the trustee in life and is not the owner or master of the created world. A balanced view of his place in the cosmos, including the privileges and the responsibilities, would spur him to correct action and prevent transgressions during his transitory sojourn on the terrestrial plane.¹⁹

Iqbal's anthropology, derived thus from traditional roots, was combined with the Western idea of the *Übermensch*, the Nietzschean superman, albeit with a difference. The perfect man or human was not man without God, but man who had realized his personal relation with God and lives, works and talks by Him in the traditional manner of the *insan-i kamil* (the complete human-being). The perfect

¹⁸ Qur'an: 33:72. "Verily we proposed to the Heavens and to the earth and to the mountains to receive the 'trust', but they refused the burden and they feared to receive it. Man undertook to bear it, but has proved unjust, senseless." Also, Sch.GW. p. 110.

¹⁹ Such is the ideal Muslim who is depicted in Iqbal's poems:

*He is the sword of God, the heir of the Prophets
he has no room in the world of others
until he brings forth a new world,
he destroys this old world.*

(A. Schimmel's translation, Sch.GW. p. 111; Mus. 7 ff.)

man is the perfect slave of God as was Muhammad the par excellence slave of God.²⁰

To illustrate his views, historical figures, including kings well known to Indians and the heroes of early Islam, were presented by Iqbal as ciphers of the Perfect Human who braces all dangers. The quasi historical allusions to celebrated people for purposes of illustrating a notion was within the traditional norms of literary devices, but the notions they represented in the poetry of Iqbal were novel. Conventional symbols and the established repertoire of allusions were reformulated by him to impart the message of new attitudes and new modalities in order to be creative in a new era of new power structures, new visions and new dimensions of communal development.

Iqbal's views, though innovative, were ultimately connected to the message of the Islamic revelation and identified with perceptions that were centuries old. Even the context of his insistence on action, influenced by German vitalist philosophy, was apparently derived from the inspiration of several Qur'anic verses, including: *Indeed God does not change the situation of men unless they change what is in themselves* (13:12); and *Hold fast to yourself; no one who errs can hurt you provided you are well guided* (5:104).

It is in the perspective of these concepts that we must discuss Iqbal's portrayal of 'Ali as the *mard-i khud-dar*, the self-reliant man, whose actions and attributes reflect a rec-

²⁰ So human excellence was also connected to the attainment of the perfect *imitatio Muhammadi*, albeit within the context of ego development not annihilation. As a composite of the above attributes, the Muslim he dreamt of is "the brilliant star for the destiny of the world" and is the best example of human perfection. Sch.GW. p. 111 ff.

ognition of his potential and who truly "lives" the message of Islam.

Hence in Iqbal's theology of the Self, 'Ali is the perfect example of someone with a perfected individuality, who actualized his potential with actions and brought glory to Islam. Such a portrayal is novel within the context of traditional Sufi thought. However, it is remarkable that, in their own varied contexts, the traditional classical poets as well as Iqbal draw upon 'Ali's personality in their didactic verses. With all of them he is consistently projected as the best example of qualities which enable mankind to achieve the desired objective of virtuous existence. Didactic poets of the classical age such as Sana'i and Rumi were fascinated by 'Ali, the mystic and sage. They idealized his spiritual attachment to God, particularly the effacement of his ego. Iqbal, on the other hand, was interested in the legacy of 'Ali as the possessor of heightened individuality and dynamic vigor—characteristics symbolized by his epithet of impetuosity or *karrar*.

Karrar (Dynamic Spontaneity)

The connotations of the various the names used for 'Ali occasioned considerable interest and Iqbal urges people to discover their essence to develop the characteristics represented by these epithets in their own persons. In an encomium from the collection entitled *Pas chi bayad kard*, he refers to King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan as *padshah-i Islam*, King of Islam. He then repeats his viewpoint of action and discusses the necessity for *karrari* (the dynamic impetuosity or spontaneity in action) similar to 'Ali:

*Love the people of skill as your own father; love
the person who possesses insight.*

Live with alertness as the lark in the nest, live with hard work, activity, and karrar.

Do you know the meaning of karrar? It is an attribute from among the spiritual stations of 'Ali.

For communities to flourish in the ephemeral world, life is not possible except with karrari.

Look at the history of the Ottomans, wounded from the treachery of the foreigners.

As long as they had a portion of karrari, they raised the flag in the other world.

Why did the Indian Muslim leave the field? His determination did not have the fragrance of karrari!

The handful of his dust has become so cold that the heat of my voice had no effect! (Iq.Pe.878,vv.9-16)

Sincerity

As with the classical poets, 'Ali's sincerity, or *ikhlas*, has been recurring motif in the verses of Iqbal, who alludes to it in the context of pragmatic concerns related to societal issues. Thus on the subject of creating an enabling environment and facilitating the dynamics of socio-political self empowerment, 'Ali's proverbial quest for universal justice made him the paradigmatic ideal of those who hold public office. During the time of the three caliphs who preceded him, he was a trusted savant, whose advice was frequently sought. Later, he did not voluntarily seek office, but accepted it under duress to preserve and further the weal of the floundering nascent Muslim community. However, once he accepted the caliphate, he searched for truth and justice without excuses or compromises. Verity was the essential destination of his leadership. Eventually, his assassination and that of his sons project the timeless struggle between decency and evil, between rectitude and immorality. His zeal for what he considered "right" for the *umma* led him to disregard personal political gains and to

relinquish the modalities of duplicity and cunning for the control of power. With the conviction stemming from his faith he accepted the responsibility to promulgate truth and justice as caliph -- and then did not waver, even when confronted with arduous challenges.

Iqbal thus applauded him as the paragon of sincerity and conscientious political measures and activities. He eulogizes 'Ali's sincerity and then condemns the unscrupulous politicians in the modern age who come to power only to hoodwink their constituents for personal aggrandizement. He refers to one such politician as an "'Antara'²¹ in the robes of Haydar." According to Iqbal, opportunistic politicians without sincerity, direction, rectitude and conviction, change their course capriciously to gain power and resources when the opportunity arises. The verses on the modalities of good rulership and salubrious leadership are presented in the *Jawidnama*. Here Iqbal presents the soul of Hindustan as lamenting and complaining about Mir Ja'far of Bengal, who betrayed the entire nation by his collaboration with the British in the battle of Plassey (1757)—such that even after his death his soul causes harm to the community. His allusion points to the politician Sir Akbar Haydari, who is chastised for his insincerity and duplicity:

*Some times he is engaged with the church,
sometimes he is in supplication before temples.*

*His religion [and] his regulation is commerce;
he is an 'Antara in the guise of Haydar.*

*So long as the world of color and smell becomes
different, his manner and his regulation becomes dif-
ferent.*

²¹ A pre-Islamic hero who represents the age of ignorance prior to Islam and is thus antithetical to the faithful Haydar.

*He is bent in prostration before several things;
in our time the country was his deity.*

*Outwardly, he is in sorrow by the pain of faith;
inwardly he has tied the zunnar like temple dwellers.*

*A Ja'far²² in every form is a slayer of the
community; this Muslim of old is a slayer of the com-
munity.*

*Laughing heartily, with none is he a friend; if a
snake is laughing, it is nothing but a snake.*
(Iq. Pe. 733, vv. 3-9)

Poetically, this 'Ali-'Antara contrast is within the norms of classical poetry, but in typical Iqbalian fashion, it is provided with an innovative dimension. The classical tradition of the use of contrasting motifs such as Rose-Nightingale, Moth-Candle, was adopted by Iqbal to contrast both abstract concepts and historical themes and personages. 'Antara and 'Ali portray antithetical norms here; while the former represents hypocrisy the latter symbolizes sincerity in actions.

In another verse, Iqbal has negatively contrasted Rustam with Haydar. In popular Persian literature both have been celebrated for valor and strength. However, for Iqbal, Rustam (same as 'Antara) represents the "foreign and non-Islamic" element, while Haydar denotes the "Arab and Islamic" part of the idiom for the community of faithful Muslims. He urged Muslims to remember their religious roots and to not get enmeshed in diverse nationalistic symbols that bring them transitory gains. Rather, they were to seek strength from the heroes of Islam and not from the

²² Mir Ja'far of Bengal facilitated British victory in the battle of Plassey (1757) and is regarded as the symbol of treachery by Iqbal. It is ironical that the name Ja'far gains a negative connotation, because in classical poetry the name is associated with Ja'far b. Abi Talib, who represents the mystical flight of the soul.

foreign, cultural champions like Rustam. In the *Jawidnama*, he scathingly criticized the trend to ignore the religious heritage and the entrenched humanistic values of Islam in favor of localized heroes and aspirations:

He is attached to the nation and bypassed his own self; he gave his heart to Rustam and bypassed Haydar.

He accepts false images from Europe, his own history he has taken from Europe. (Iq.Pc,762,vv.5-6)

In classical poetry, panegyric poets mingle Rustam and 'Ali to represent the valor of their ruler-patrons. Even Rumi provides a positive connotation to Rustam. Iqbal has retained the Rustam-'Ali association, but has changed the context. 'Ali illustrates the Islamic heritage, while Rustam belongs to a non-Muslim context and is not a suitable model to emulate. Muslims ought not to bypass their own legacy and ought to seek inspiration from the numerous heroes of their own heritage. From being at par with 'Ali in classical poetry, Rustam is considered antithetical to 'Ali by Iqbal. Faith becomes the catalyst for change when inspired by the example of preceding heroes from within the spiritual community.

Faqr (Penury or Spiritual Poverty)

Poets in both epochs, classical and present, dwell on 'Ali's sincerity together with his dismissal of worldly riches. Like the early poets, Iqbal was attracted to the simplicity of 'Ali's personal life. It becomes evident that through the centuries, in community lore, 'Ali is consistently respected for his deliberate dismissal of material possessions. For the classical poets, his poverty, *faqr*, indicated spiritual humility and elevation because of the absolute sincerity with which he submitted to God. On the other hand, Iqbal cele-

brates his *faqr* as an attribute that portrays his resolute strength and facilitates the action required to exalt human destiny. Whatever the motivation, fascination with his poverty and spartan life remains constant in both epochs. For Iqbal, 'Ali's *faqr* is symbolized by his simple diet of barley bread, which provides him with the *zur-i bazu*, strength of arm, necessary for a pro-active dynamic existence that focuses on enhancing communal felicity. Iqbal fervently eulogizes 'Ali's voluntary poverty on several occasions, and connects it to his legendary power and strength—all of which is heightened due to his simple food and personal habits. These were the choices of a lifestyle which lead him to expend his resources of wealth and energy for his community and not to use his talents for his own self augmentation. Hence the injunction from Iqbal: "If you have a spark in your dust, think neither of poverty nor riches, for in the world, strength like that of Haydar is dependent on barley bread" (Iq.Ur.252,v.5).

'Ali's simplicity in the daily diet of barley bread augmented his valor and potency. Iqbal views the resolute spiritual, moral and physical strength of 'Ali to be in contrast to the feebleness and lack of vigor prevalent in contemporary Muslims. He correlates simple barley bread with strength of arm and associates it with the episode of the conquest of Khaybar in the seventh year of the Prophet's migration to Medina. This popularity of the motifs of valor associated with the event of Khaybar is available in the verses of the classical poets as well. However, Iqbal uses the episode of Khaybar to allude to a *modus operandi* that delineates sincerity and courage. Intrepid conquerors of Khaybar such as 'Ali are needed in contemporary Islamic society to bring forward the wellsprings of progress and development, to vanquish the ills that affect the community. The plight of the community is especially heightened

by the fact that it lacks direction and individuals with the *zur-i bazu* of 'Ali. So he laments in the *Bal-i Jibril*:

*This war of religion and country is more than
that of Khaybar; in this age is there anyone who is
Haydar-i Karrar? (Iq.Ur.356,v.3)*

According to Iqbal, 'Ali's simplicity and inherent sincerity made him the representative of true *faqr*. In a Persian ode on *faqr* from *Pas chi bayad kard*, he asks:

*What is faqr, O servants of water and clay? It is
a path-seeing eye, a living heart.*

*Faqr is the seriousness in one's activity; it is
enmeshed in the two letters of la ilaha.*

*The faqr of the Khaybar-conqueror is with barley
bread; with his tied up saddle-straps, he is sovereign
and king.*

*Faqr is desire and passion and submission and
acceptance; we are the trustees of these goods of
Mustafa. (Iq.Pe.816,vv.1-4)*

In classical Sufi thought, *faqr* implied a state of voluntary poverty whereby the novice prepares for the elevation of the soul. He gives up all the extraneous elements of existence and concentrates on union with the Beloved. Though Iqbal uses *faqr* in its traditional association as a positive aspect of life, which was the essence of the faith of prophets and saints, he connects it with his philosophy of dynamic action. In his person 'Ali epitomizes this positive poverty, and his conquest of Khaybar symbolizes the victory of metaphysical *faqr* over mundane wealth. He suggests that we should not simply speak of world renunciation, but that the actual renunciation of the world is only possible after it has been conquered, (for then it is with a

free-will).²³ The present plight of the community is because of the paucity of such Kaybar conquering pro-activists, who would redeem the prestige and glory of their religion with their barley-bread simplicity and *zur-i bazu*.

In a *rubā'i* (quatrain) from the *Armaghan-i Hijaz* (The Gift of Hijaz), the strength of arm that is like Haydar alludes to the attributes of the person whose heart is freed from avarice in the two worlds:

*Give him a pure minded youth,
Whose happiness is from the wine of house-building;
The strength of his arm is like that of Haydar,
His heart is independent [of desire] in both worlds.*
(Iq.Pe.935, ruba'i #3)

Similarly in an Urdu verse from the *Darb-i Kalim*, Iqbal describes the *mard-i musulman*, the real Muslim, and prays that God may grant his community the sword of *faqr*, for: "If this sword comes into one's grip, then a *mu'min* (faithful) is either the intrepid Khalid²⁴ or Haydar-i Karrar" (Iq.Ur.489,v.5-6).

In the famous poem "Jawab-i Shikwa" from the *Bang i Dara*, the *faqr* idiom is again associated with 'Ali. Again the lamentable condition of Muslims is projected as a direct result of their apathy and neglect of the salient injunctions of their faith. They lack the zeal and enthusiasm of their ancestors, who were sovereigns over large areas of the world that they ruled with fairness and compassion. While earlier Muslims were involved in prayer, fasting and steadfast adherence to their faith, present Muslims lack that

²³ Iq.Pe.817,v.11ff and 818,vv.5-7ff; also Sch.GW. pp.140-8, provides a detailed discussion on the concept of *faqr* (poverty) according to Iqbal.

²⁴ Khalid b. al-Walid is a famous Muslim general.

ardent zeal and are only concerned with the satisfaction of their mundane aspirations. Among other faults they lack the *faqr* of Haydar. Thus:

Everyone is intoxicated with the wine of the ardor of easy life; you are Musulmans? Is this the manner of Muslims?

[Neither] is there the faqr of Haydar nor is there the wealth of 'Uthman; what spiritual connection do you have with the ancient?

They were respected in their age for being Muslims, and you have become degraded by forsaking the Qur'an. (Iq.Ur.203,v.12 and 204,vv.1-2)

And in *Bal-i Jibril*, he similarly laments the attitude of the youth in the community:

Your sofas are European, your carpets are Iranian, the laziness of youths make me weep blood.

What is authority, of what use, even if it be the grandeur of Chosroes? You have neither Haydar's strength nor Salman's²⁵ independence. (Iq.Ur.411,v.5; and 412,v.5)

Not only is *faqr* an important personal quality but it is a significant requirement of dynamic rulership. Together with *'ishq*, *faqr* is an essential quality for a Muslim ruler. In an encomium for Amir Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan, one of the few politically independent Islamic rulers during Iqbal's time, he comments: "Sovereignty in our faith is to serve; it is the Faruq-like justice, and the Haydar-like *faqr*" (Iq.Pe.190,v.3).

Service to people was an important element in the traditional grandeur associated with Islamic sovereignty, as discussed in a poem from the collection *Payam-i Mashriq*

²⁵ Salman al-Farsi, was a Persian companion of the Prophet.

(Message of the East). This collection of poetry was Iqbal's reply to the Western norms that were evident everywhere in society and was also his answer to Goethe's *West-Ostlicher Divan*.

Those Muslims who have been rulers, they have practiced faqiri (poverty) in their sovereignty....

Everyone in whose possession is the love of Mustafa, ocean and land (entire world) is contained in a corner of his skirt.

Seek from God the burning ardor of Siddiq and 'Ali; seek from God a smidgen of the love of the Prophet.

Since the community has life from his love, every fruit in the universe is from his love. (Iq.Pc.190,vv.10, 13-14; and 191,v.1)²⁶

The *faqr*, a source of strength and an important attribute in a person's nature, is also evident from a prayer in the *Bal-i Jibril* in which he supplicated:

Make hearts the center of love and faithfulness, make them acquainted with the sanctuary of greatness.

To the one to whom You have bestowed the barley bread, grant him also the arm of Haydar. (Iq.Ur.301,vv.6-7)

In a poem from the *Darb-i Kalim*, Iqbal describes the qualities of the perfect youth who is loved by his tribe (i.e. community). In battle he is ferocious as a lion. and in peace he is gentle as a gazelle. His sorrow incorporates all pain, and he is like the single spark that sets the reed-bed on fire. Most importantly, he has *faqr* and 'Ali-like attributes.

²⁶ See, Sch.GW. p. 44.

Thus: "God has granted him royal grandeur, for his *faqr* is like Haydar and Karrar" (Iq.Ur.633,v.6).

When emphasizing the importance of *faqr*, Iqbal warns in the *Payam-i Mashriq* that to acquire the merits of real poverty and the secret of 'Ali's attributes are not facile to acquire:

The world of love knows neither chief nor captain; it is sufficient to know the regulations of servitude.

Not everyone who goes around the idol and ties a zunnar knows idol-worship and has the manners of a kafir.

There are a thousand Khaybars and a hundred types of dragons here; not everyone who eats barley bread knows the ways of Haydar. (Iq.Pe.345,vv.2-4)

Hence in *Darb-i Kalim*, Iqbal declares his preference for 'Ali's strength and simplicity versus the shallow futility of intellectualism that has no grounding principles: "For me the strength of Haydar is sufficient; in your portion lies the sharp intellect of Plato"²⁷ (Iq.Ur.585,v.4).

Although 'Ali was regarded by Iqbal as the personification of *faqr* par excellence, it was also an important character trait of the other companions of the Prophet. A vital and symptomatic feature of the early Islamic community, it may be regarded as the *sine qua non* of its success. The Prophet had inspired his followers with his proclivity for a life that is focused on the essentials of existence—servitude to the Almighty and the service of His creation. As such, the allurements towards the material constructs, if rejected, can consolidate the central nucleus of sincere serving. It has been recorded that the Prophet stated that "poverty is my

²⁷ Iqbal apparently disliked Plato and referred to him as the 'leader of the old sheep of idealism.'

pride." Taking a cue from this, in the poem titled the "Rise of Islam," Iqbal provides reasons for Islam's old glory which superseded the power of previous dominions:

*The thing that demolished the despotism of Caesar
and Chosroes,²⁸ what was it? The strength of Haydar,
the faqr of Abu Dharr, the sincerity of Salman!*
(Iq.Ur.270,v.7)

'Ishq (Love)

From the secular and mundane aspect of inter-human connectivity to the sacred and transcendent linkage between the human and the Divine, 'ishq, love, becomes the primal force of existence. Ardent love, 'ishq, as an important Sufi term, has been incorporated in Iqbal's philosophy as a dynamic force that helps to consolidate the ego and becomes a catalyst to create the passionate pulsating activity in life.²⁹ It enables an individual to transcend their limitations of imagination and action, and to realize that his potential is vast, that he may with the energy bestowed by Divine Grace act for elevating his personal self and that of the humanity which surrounds him. A person is enabled to approach the Transcendent Divine only with the potency of ardent love. In traditional terms, the potency of 'ishq was solely used to discuss the necessity of the appropriate human nexus with the Transcendent Lord. However, as with other traditional terms, Iqbal has stretched the connotation for this term to refer to the kinetic, intense zeal with

²⁸ In *hadith*, tradition, the grandeur and worldly power of Caesar and Chosroes is contrasted with Muhammad's simplicity and spiritual might.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion on the concept of 'ishq according to Iqbal, see Sch.GW. pp. 125, 129ff., 133ff., 191.

which a concerned individual attempts to uplift the community. It is thus not simply an idiom to adduce the meditative focus of the contemplative mystic, but rather the description of the pro-active visionary who serves to uplift his community. For Iqbal, 'Ali again reflects the perfect personification of this love. *'Ishq* was inherent in the zeal with which he defended Islam, displayed courage in battles, accepted the Prophet's injunctions, and in his daily actions strived to gain God's mercy. 'Ali is portrayed as the emblematical perfection of *'ishq*, who combines in himself both an intense personal love, and the dynamic love connected to divine mercy that endows strength and power to all human endeavors. Thus the description of in the *Bal-i Jibril*:

Love is sometimes the solitude of hills and valleys.

Love is sometimes anguish and pleasure and assemblies.

Love is sometimes the treasure of mihrab and minbar.

Love is sometimes the Khaybar-demolishing Mawla 'Ali. (Iq.Ur.379,87 #2)

And again, according to the *Bal-i Jibril*, it is 'Ali's heart that bears this love—and Iqbal aspires to have a similar emotive engagement with his community. In a poem he entreats the *saqi* (cupbearer of the blessings of Heaven): "Grant me the ability to toss and throb; grant me the heart of Murtada ('Ali), the burning of Siddiq" (Iq.Ur.416,v.12).

In classical Persian poetry, the *saqi*, cup-bearer, is traditionally a propitious figure who fulfils one's desires. In the love lyric, presented as the bestower of the wine of love, the term *saqi* is commonly used as a synonym for the Divine Beloved in the mystical context. This motif is an

essential aspect of Sufi topoi, where the *saqi* as the metaphor for the Grace of God is evoked and entreated for myriad aspirations. In the accepted conventional norm, in this poem Iqbal requests the *saqi* to fulfill his wishes. However, as is usual with him, a new modification appears. The *saqi* is asked to free the intellect from the fetters of slavery and to make the youth the teacher for old age. The *saqi* does not merely give the wine of love with which the lover seeks union with the beloved, but bestows the restlessness and the constant activity which is elemental for community progress. Another motif, the contrast of love versus reason or intellect, is also taken over by Iqbal from the classical literary heritage and transposed. In the traditional Sufi context, love has been commonly contrasted to *'aql* (reason, intellect) and *'ilm* (knowledge, science). Love was considered diametrically opposed to the intellectual aptitude that inhibited a person's quest for transcendence. In Iqbal's verses, philosophers, in the main, symbolize the constrained and narrow spread of pure reason, which in turn was contrasted to the vastness of flight and the ardor of passion incorporated in dynamic action and in poetry that invigorates and directs one to action.

Once again, in a *ruba'i* from the *Bal-i Jibril*, the perfected persona of 'Ali represents the perfection of love:

*The beauty (jamal) of love and intoxication is
flute-playing (nay-nawazi);*

*The power (jalal) of love and intoxication is
independence (biniyazi);*

*The perfection (kamal) of love and intoxication
is the capability (zarf) of Haydar;*

*The end (zawal) of love and intoxication is the
word (harf) of Razi.³⁰ (Iq.Ur.375, ruba'i #4)*

³⁰ The philosopher Fakhruddin ar-Razi (died 1210).

The opposition between abstracted intellect and passionate love as respectively represented by Razi and 'Ali is a frequent theme in Iqbal's poetry. It also appears in the mystico-didactical literature because it was considered that the pure intellect, devoid of love, retarded one's quest for the ultimate Gnostic experience of God. According to Iqbal, knowledge without love is demonic and antithetic to spirituality. In a lyrical poem in the *Jawidnama*, 'Ali referred to as Haydar represents the order of love, while Abu Lahab (a hostile uncle of the Prophet) represents the diabolical opposite of the futile and vain knowledge that had been the cause of Satan's fall as well. Iqbal recommends that Iblis (Lucifer) with all the other evil could be eradicated and transformed to worthiness and goodness by the sword of the Qur'an. In this context, the rectitude of 'Ali symbolized by the epithet of Haydar-i Karrar, becomes the antithesis for the resounding wickedness and evil of Abu Lahab: "Make the blind 'seeing' with vision [of *'ishq*]; transform the Abu Lahab into a Haydar-i Karrar" (Iq.Pe.663,v.5).

Iqbal's appeal to transform the evil essence of one's being into goodness is derived from concepts that have been incorporated in the spiritual life of Muslims for centuries. In mystical circles, to struggle against the *naqfs* and to purify it was the very first step of the novice. The inspiration to eliminate satanic impulses and to transform them into positive aspects of faith is derived from the Prophetic tradition: *aslama shaytani*, "my *satan* has surrendered."³¹ According to Iqbal, evil may be eliminated with the potency of love that serves and that is selfless.

In another poem Iqbal reiterates the message to turn towards good and presents the familiar contrast between

³¹ Sch.MM. pp. 61, 276, n.18; Furuzanfar, #459.

intellect and love, together with the need for action in life. In the *Zabur-i 'Ajam* he states:

Time after time whatever the intellect carves is broken. Come forth! Because 'ishq is a Muslim and intellect is a zunnar.

The commander of the caravan is hard working and constantly striving, because in our clan to be as Haydar is from karrari (constant impetuous striving).

You closed your eyes and said that this world is a dream; open your eyes, for this dream is a dream of awareness. (Iq.Pe.468,vv.2-4)

Within the context of Iqbal's contention, knowledge as such, especially modern futile intellectualism, is detrimental for the individual and the community.³² While love represents Islam, abstracted intellect is its denial. Love leads to the action and the leadership which are the attributes of an excellent caravan commander, as represented by the serious and virtuous impetuosity of 'Ali's actions.

Though Iqbal had studied philosophy, in keeping with his views on love and intellectualism, philosophy devoid of the element of faith was criticized. Human thoughts and rationality enriched by faith, rather than insulated as pure thoughts and theories, would lead to the fulfillment of one's potential in life—a God granted fulfillment that is sacred and righteous.

In a poem in the *Darb-i Kalim* he reminds a philosophy-oriented Sayyid (from the family of the Prophet) that he is a descendant of the Hashimids (clan of the Prophet). The hint implies that on account of his genealogical association with 'Ali (known to engage in action, not empty

³² At another place he has thus criticized modern knowledge as "the greatest blindness, which is idol-worshipping, idol selling, idol-making." See Sch.GW. p.135.

speculations), he ought to follow the message of Muhammad, and refrain from speculative philosophy:

The end result of intellectualism is to be absent [in God]; philosophy is remote from life.

The silent soundless songs of mere thoughts are as death for the vibrancy of action.

Religion gives direction in the path of life; religion is the secret of Muhammad and Abraham.

Bind in your heart the words of Muhammad, O son of 'Ali! What have you to do with Abu 'Ali.³³ (Iq. Ur.480, vv.11-13; and 481,v.1)

These verses echo the concern of the early didactic poets on the issue of the 'Alids, that piety not genealogy is what determines spiritual elevation. To be complacent about lineage and socio-physiological heritage reduces the essential humanity in a person. Each person's intrinsic worth becomes enhanced only with personal exertion and the application of cognitive energies to enable the truth. A person cannot and must not rest on the laurels of ancestry but become personally responsible for deeds that would leave a salubrious imprint on human history.

Haydar

As with classical poets, 'Ali's appellation of Haydar, lion, denoted special strength and courage for Iqbal. To possess Haydar's attributes in one's personality denoted a distinctive invigorated power in existential terms. In his *Jawid-nama*, Iqbal has incorporated some 'words' of the Shi'a

³³ In mystical circles, the philosopher Abu 'Ali b. Sina is traditionally considered to be far removed from the secret of the essence of the Divine Beloved, and hence not to be followed or even trusted in any way.

poet Ghalib: "We are from Haydar, you and I; with us it is not astonishing, if we turn back the sun towards the east" (Iq.Pe.706,v.4).³⁴

The attributes of Haydar-ness symbolized not only a special potency in an individual, but also represented the distinctive vigor and strength in the community derived from the message of Islam. Iqbal proclaims Haydar to be amongst the blessings of the early Muslim community together with other famous personalities such as Faruq, Siddiq, Husayn, Ayyub, Bayazid, and such events as occurred in the fields of Badr and Hunayn. Iqbal recounts the favors that the Prophet bestowed on the community:

*He broke every ancient god; from his moisture,
every day a branch came into bloom:*

*The heat of the turmoil in Badr and Hunayn;
Haydar and Faruq and Siddiq and Husayn;...*

*All this is a single moment from his [enduring]
times, one manifestation from his manifestations....*

*Limitless praise for the pure Messenger, who
bestowed [the gift of] faith to a handful of dust.
(Iq.Pe.835,vv.8-9; and 836,vv.6,8)*

As is evident from these verses, the cohesive structure in Islam and the visible harmony in the early community is an important motif in Iqbal's poetry. He constantly referred to the unity of the *umma*, as for instance in a poem in the *Rumuz-i Bikhudi*, he narrates the story of Abu 'Ubayda³⁵ and his companions for the significance of Islamic brotherhood. During battle a prisoner sought sanctuary from a

³⁴ Ghalib, *Ghazaliyat-i Farsi*, edited by Sayyid Wazir al-Hasan 'Abidi, Lahore, 1969. P. 359, v.10.

³⁵ Abu 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrah (died 639) was a companion of the Prophet who was given command over Muslim troops in Syria during the time of 'Umar.

Muslim soldier. Subsequently it became known that the prisoner was not an ordinary soldier but in fact the leader of the opponents. Abu 'Ubayda, the commander of the Muslim army, accepted the refuge granted by the Muslim soldier and refused to let him be killed. In the narration, Iqbal alludes to Haydar to portray the unity and harmony among the companions which led to the glory of the early Islamic community. Abu 'Ubayda reasoned thus with his companions to honor the sanctuary granted by an ordinary Muslim soldier:

He said: O friends, we are Muslims, we are the strings of one harp and are of the same tune.

The na'ra³⁶ of Haydar is the sound of Abu Dharr, even though it may come from the throat of Bilal or Qanbar.

Every one of us is a trustee of the community; his peace and quarrel is the peace and quarrel of the community. (Iq.Pe.106,vv.4-6)

Haydar at Khaybar

As with traditional poets, the Haydar-Khaybar motif is frequently used by Iqbal. In his verses he also contrasts Haydar and Khaybar (a fortress in the outskirts of Medina), and he presents them as antithetical motifs. While Haydar symbolizes the epitome of ethics and virtues in Islam, Khaybar indicates the denial and rejection of the commands of God. He used the contrasting symbols with irony in the *Zabur-i 'Ajam*, where he set forth that the human heart is capricious, and that the situation of the seeker unable to reach

³⁶ Lit. "roar." The *na'ra* (rallying cry) of Haydar refers to the *takbir* (magnification of God) that was called aloud during battles.

the sacred goal due to indolence and lack of conviction is lamentable:

My unrestrained heart with the light of faith has acted as a kafir; it has prostrated before the haram,³⁷ and has served idols;...

At times it mixes with truth; at times it fights with truth; at times it has been like Haydar; at times it has been like Khaybar. (Iq.Pe.424,vv.1,4)

According to Iqbal the lack of conviction was the main cause for the crisis of identity and the loss of willingness to pull towards progress and development. In the poem his slothful and wayward heart, which personifies the community, is chastised for its lack of colorful rigor and its deception. Since it is chameleon-like in its essence, it is unable to reach and attain the mainspring of its being, wherein is the source of its power and strength. By the same token the community too, by its capriciousness loses the possibility of deriving the ultimate potential of its existence.

In contrast, the person who seeks to confront fate with fervor has Haydar's fortitude and beholds the nine spheres as nine Khaybars that can be subdued with ease. In the *Jawidnama*, Iqbal presents the Prophet as possessing the strength similar to that of 'Ali:

Before him nine skies are nine Khaybars, his strike is of the calibre of Haydar....

He flies in the vastness of light, his claw has grasped Gabriel and the houris.

So long as his fortune is from ma zaghā al-basar;³⁸

³⁷ I.e. the sanctuary of Ka'ba.

³⁸ Qur'an, 53.17. "His sight did not swerve..." refers to the Prophet's *mi'raj* (spiritual ascension) and his proximity to God.

*In the place of His servant*³⁹ *he became a companion.* (Iq.Pe.675,vv.9-11-12)

In the *Jawidnama*, the Haydar-Khaybar symbolism portrays the sorry state of Muslim civilization where the false knowledge of Europeans exists together with the maladies of such rogues as the usurer, *mulla*, *pir* and *wali* (ruler): "The knowledge of the Europeans causes desolation; the monasteries have become Khaybar because of the absence of Haydar's qualities....⁴⁰ There are four maladies in this world,⁴¹ —the usurer, wali, mulla and pir—" (Iq.Pe.778,vv.6,8).

The challenging task of socio-political reconstruction and spiritual rejuvenation is only possible with the potency of Haydar. In the classical mode of the "where is...?" anaphoric construction, in the *Bal-i Jibril*, Iqbal asks for a Haydar-i Karrar who would help Muslims in their plight of lassitude, complacency, and lack of zeal to build and to progress, to envision and to hope:

Is there beauty of thoughts anywhere in the schools? Is there the delight of mysteries anywhere in the khanqahs?

The destination of travelers is distant and arduous; in this caravan is anyone the caravan-leader?

This war of religion and nation supersedes that of Khaybar; in this age is there any Haydar-i Karrar? (Iq.Ur.356,vv.1-3)

Consistently, Iqbal comments on the sacred transcendent source of 'Ali's strength. In the *Rumuz-i Bikhudi*, he

³⁹ Qur'an, 17.1, 53.10.

⁴⁰ Lit. non-Haydar-ness.

⁴¹ Lit. ancient commander.

suggests that a person who acknowledges God's absolute power and accepts the foundational principle of *Allahu as-samad*⁴² is freed from the confining limitations of the material world, surpassing existential bondage. Such a servant of truth is never the servant of "causes"; because life is not like the rotation of the water-mill, moved by cause and effect only. Existence in all its multihued variation represents the dynamic grace of the Creator, which can only be comprehended if there is freedom from mundane elements and attentiveness towards eternal values. Real freedom excludes the need for succor from strangers and incorporates the regimen of constant goodness in life. In this context, similar to the classical masters, Khaybar represents negative habits and forces in existence which must be overcome by the man of action:

*Like 'Ali, with the instrument of barley bread,
break the neck of Marhab,⁴³ conquer Khaybar.*
(Iq.Pe.158,v.5)

Iqbal continues that a real Muslim has an elevated status like Joseph, and must not undermine himself by accepting the sustenance of menial servility. Even though he be meek, submissive and docile like an ant without wings, he must not take his needs, wants and requirements before the Solomon of terrestrial strength and glory. One must bestow alms, not beseech material charity; one must endeavor to be like an elixir, replete with possibilities, not be abject as the mud. (Iq.Pe.158,v.6 ff)

Dhu'l-Fiqr, Sword

⁴² Qur'an, 112.2, "God is the Eternal-Absolute."

⁴³ Marhab was a warrior who was subdued by 'Ali at Khaybar.

The traditional interest in 'Ali's two-edged sword Dhu'l-Fiqar has been retained in Iqbal's repertoire of images. The possession of 'Ali's sword required special attributes—a sentiment that prevails in the early poets also. In the *Armaghan-i Hijaz*, he supplicates in a formulated prayer:

*Raise up a garden from my dust;
Mix the moisture of my eyes with tulip blood;
If I am not worthy of the sword of 'Ali;
Give me eyes sharp like the sword of 'Ali.*
(Iq.Pe.938, ruba'i #3)

In the *Rumuz-i Bikhudi*, he describes the auspicious Dhu'l-Fiqar sword as the repository of glory. In a poetic debate between the arrow and the sword, Iqbal expressed:

*The arrow from the lips of its notch spoke of the
secret of truth; it said to the sword in the heat of battle:*

*O the one with the essence of fairies in your
qaf,⁴⁴ the Dhu'l-Fiqar of Haydar is among your
ancestors....*

*The fire of the wrath of God is your asset; the
gardens of paradise⁴⁵ lie under your shadow.*
(Iq.Pe.97, vv.1-2,4)

This glorification of the sword is related to Iqbal's concern about the energy and strength of the vigorous ego, which like the sword, has the potential of conquering the elements of depression and lethargy around it.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The mythical mountain that surrounds the earth; here it refers to the essence or origin of the sword.

⁴⁵ Qur'an, 18.107. "As to those who have faith and perform righteous deeds, they have for their entertainment, *jannat al-firdaws*, the gardens of paradise."

⁴⁶ Sch.Gw. p. 118.

The imagery of 'Ali's sword together with the Haydar-Khaybar motif has been used for defining *time*,⁴⁷ alluded to as "sword" by the eminent jurist Shafi'i. Iqbal dwells upon this imagery in a poem titled: "Time is a Sword" in the *Asrar-i Khudi*. As usual he incorporates the usage of a traditional term in his message only to change it and reflect his own thoughts on the dynamic quality of existence. He suggests that there are almost unlimited possibilities for those who extricate themselves from the mundane serial passage of duration, and grasp the intrinsic value of their existence in time—a precious unit of life that is transitory and effervescent—that will vanish without trace if not permeated with deeds of virtue to give it an enduring context and keep it eternally alive.

What should I say? What is the secret of this sword? Its luster (ab) possesses wealth from life....

Haydar's palm, that was Khaybar conquering, its strength was from this very sword.

The turning of the rotating spheres is visible, the revolution of day and night is understandable.

See inside! O slaves of yesterday and tomorrow, in your own hearts see another world. (Iq.Pe.71,vv.3, 8-10)

The motif of the sword to describe the phenomenon of time is in keeping with Iqbal's philosophy of action. Time is like the capital of wealth that aids in the realization of potentials in human existence. When time is used effectively to create salubrious actions, human destiny is stirred towards harmony and the triumph of hope. Thus 'Ali's actions at Khaybar and that of Moses at the Red Sea indicate the potency of human endeavors in time, by which

⁴⁷ Many of his poems deal with the problem of time. Sch.GW. p. 293ff.

destinies are created and the salubrious potency of sacred providence is actualized. Such feats of majesty and innate actualization of the human soul require us to go beyond the serial passage of time as measured by the passing of night and day. It is not a coincidence that 'Ali is mentioned in this poetical exposé of time. He projects the man of action *par excellence*, who has comprehended the source of time and destiny—the consecrated and pristine realm of Ultimate Reality. Only with the dynamic activities of individuals like 'Ali does history move and the collective existential potential of humanity become realized. In these verses Iqbal suggests that time be comprehended in its entirety, so that its value is recognized and the indolence of the human spirit is eliminated.

'Ali's identification with the sword called Dhu'l Fiqar is also the common focus of the legends of heros in various regions and cultures. The sword of King Arthur was called Excaliber, Beowolf's sword was named Hrunting, and Arjuna's bow was titled Gandeeva. The instruments of these heros represented the special prowess of their masters, prowess that was not to be imitated or eliminated.

Fatimah

Fatimah was the youngest daughter of Muhammad married to 'Ali. In the historical and socio-cultural legacy of Muslims, reverence and affection for her has been continuous and universal. She has been considered as the Madonna of paradise, elevated over Mary, the mother of Jesus. Similar to classical poets, Iqbal celebrates in verse, his reverence and affection for Fatimah. In the *Rumuz-i Bikhudi*, he refers to her as the perfect model for Muslim women. In her varied roles as daughter, wife and mother, she was associated with her father Muhammad, the mercy for all worlds; with

her husband 'Ali, the solver of difficulties and lion of God; with her sons Hasan and Husayn, the youthful pride of the community. Her supreme prestige and enduring radiance emanated not only because of her familial associations, but also due to her personal attributes and characteristics. In a poignant ode entitled "On the significance that the leader of women, Fatimah the luminous, is the perfect paragon for the women of Islam," Iqbal reflects thus on her unique qualities:

Mary is beloved due to the single link with Jesus; the excellent Fatimah is beloved due to three affiliations:

She is the light of the eyes of the mercy for the worlds, the leader for the former and the later;

The one who breathed life in the form of the world, and created destiny with new statutes.

She is the wife of that crown-bearer of hal ata; Murtada, the solver of difficulties, the lion of God—

A king, but a hut was his royal court; one sword and one mail of armor were his only possessions.

She is the mother of the central point of the compass of love, and the mother of the caravan leader of love.

The one (Hasan) is the candle of the night-chamber of sacredness, the protector of the community which is best of all nations,

As he puts douses on the fire of war and revenge, he puts his feet upon the crown and the ring bezel.⁴⁸

And the other (Husayn) is the leader of the pious ones in the world, the strength of the arm of the free ones in the world.

⁴⁸ Allusion to Hasan's abdication and reconciliation with Mu'awiya.

In the song of life, the burning ardor is from Husayn, the people of truth learn freedom from Husayn.

The temperament of children is from mothers, the essence of sincerity and purity is from mothers.

In the field of submission, the produce is from Batul, for mothers, the perfect paragon is Batul.

For the sake of a destitute person, her heart was so consumed that she sold her veil to a Jew.

Light and also fire were obedient to her; her will was lost in the will of her husband.

With etiquettes nourished by patience and contentment she rotated the mill, as her lips recited the Qur'an.

Her lament that was free of indolence⁴⁹ was scattering pearls in the skirt of her prayers.

Her tears were lifted by Gabriel from the ground and scattered like dew in the high heaven.

Association with truth's regulation is the chain on the foot; it is the respect for commands of the honored Mustafa—

Otherwise, I would have revolved around her grave, and would have scattered prostrations on her dust. (Iq.Pe.152-3)

In this ode Iqbal draws on the traditional images to portray Fatimah as the paragon of distinction and superiority. Taking a cue from the story of Fatimah and the mill in 'Attar's *Musibatnama*,⁵⁰ he comments on her turning the mill. Other aspects of her piety, such as her prayers, and tearful supplications are also related and celebrated. The conclusion of the ode is unexpected: Iqbal claims to be so impressed by her virtues, that but for the commands of the

⁴⁹ Lit. *balin* = pillow or cushion, that represents laziness and ease.

⁵⁰ 'A.MN.40, vv. 7-14.

Prophet which anchor him, he would have circumambulated her grave and prostrated himself on the dust in front.

During Iqbal's period the role of women for the stability of the community was an important topic, discussed by the community. Writers with the message of reform and community empowerment frequently edified their audience regarding the necessity for pro-active virtuous and pioneering women in the society. The positive or negative influence of women on their milieu was a recurring topic in a variety of literary genres. For instance, in a didactic novel titled, *Mir'at al-'Arus* (Mirror for Married Women), Nazir Ahmad presented the case of two sisters and discussed the varied effects of their contrasting demeanor for the family and the community. While the reason and harmony of one sister brought peace and tranquility for her family, the disagreeable and uncouth manner of the other sister brought stress and strife in her married life. Similarly, Iqbal too has focused on the virtues of a "good" woman. In this context Fatimah becomes the paradigmatic exemplar for all women at all times for all places. The ode on the intrinsic merits of Fatimah is followed by an "address to the virtuous matron of Islam." In this poem, Iqbal states that women are source of compassion, the strength of religion, and the foundation of the community. They shape the thoughts, the speech, and the actions of a nation. They possess ardor for religion and their eyes are brave and intrepid. Women protect the wealth of the community. They must illuminate their eye of awareness with the example of the luminous Zahrah, so that a Husayn may blossom from their branch and the early period of the faith may flower once again. According to the implied message in this poem, the onus of the vitalization of the Muslim community in the present world is upon women in general and on mothers in particular. Only a mother like Fatimah may have a righteous

son like Husayn who renews the injunctions of the faith by his sacrifice and resolute compliance to the truth.

Hasan and Husayn

Hasan and Husayn were the two surviving grandsons of the Prophet, the children of Fatimah and 'Ali. Both faced severe tribulations in life and suffered intensely due to members of the ruling party. Yet both held on to the Islamic path of justice and verity with sincerity and courage. For hundreds of years they have been universally revered by the community for their connection to the Prophet, their virtues and steadfast faith. Allegiance to the normative values in the Prophet's message was more significant for them than worldly status. Like the classical Persian poets, Iqbal is reverential towards the legacy of Hasan and Husayn. They have been referred to as the pride of the community and as symbols of the freedom and the dynamism inherent in the Islamic revelation. Their example, if followed, would bring forth the gifts of communal dignity.

As discussed, one of Iqbal's favorite topics was the salutary effects of poverty, because only with a spartan lifestyle can the real glory of human existence be realized without encumbrances. In the context of this voluntary poverty, or *faqr*, the two brothers have been glorified like their father, 'Ali. With poverty a person is stripped of all pretensions and all associations with praise and glory. Poverty is cherished as the inner-sanctum of human consciousness that precludes greed and dishonesty. *Naked* poverty then becomes an ideal that would liberate the seeker of the truth, the champion of the community, the stalwart honor of the nation, from the material encrustations associated with the selfish grasping of resources. The ideal leader to draw his (her) community towards the path of weal would

eschew materialism, turning instead to the issues of assistance, development, and progress. In the ode on *faqr* from the collection *Pas Chi Bayad Kard* (So then what ought to be done?), he comments:

*When faqr becomes naked under the shield, from
its fear, the moon and sun tremble.*

*Naked faqr is in the heat of Badr and Hunayn,
naked faqr is in the call of the takbir by Husayn.*

*As long as the desire for nakedness remained
with faqr, the glory remained with Muslims.*
(Iq. Pc. 818, vv. 10-12)

As was the case with 'Ali, his two sons also have been eulogized by Iqbal in the *Bal-i Jibril* (The Wings of Gabriel) as paragons of ardent love '*ishq*, because of their commitment and devotion to Islam. It is only with this intense dedication and committed love that the young, energetic champions of their communities can take on the effective mantle of leadership—guiding and rejuvenating their people in present times.

*In the caravan of Hejaz there is no single
Husayn, though the curling water of Tigris and
Euphrates is still warm.*

*'Ishq is the foremost guide for intellect and heart
and glance, if there were no*

*'Ishq, law and religion would be a veritable idol
house of fantasies.*

*'Ishq is the truth of Khalil (Abraham), 'ishq is
the patience of Husayn.*

*In the battle field of existence, Badr and
Hunayn are also 'ishq. (Iq. Ur. 404, vv. 4-6)*

Despite the passage of centuries, in Islamic ethos the tragedy at Karbala has never ceased to evoke compassion and remorse for the victims. Compassion that the innocent young victims lost their lives in the raw foray of greed and

tyranny; remorse that the Prophet's community was unable to protect his grandson and members of his family.

Iqbal expresses his deep sorrow at Husayn's fate and laments the circumstances. In an ode titled: "On the significance of freedom in Islam and the secret of the event of Karbala," Husayn has been portrayed as the ideal "lover" who sacrificed his life for faith. This "son of Batul," i.e. Fatimah, is "the free cypress from the garden of the Rasul (Messenger)," ⁵¹ who symbolizes the superlative qualities of the Islamic tradition. The elevated status of this prince among people was even more enhanced when the shoulders of the Seal of Prophets became a camel for him. This allusion to a family scene is tender and poignant. As a young child, Husayn would playfully ride on the shoulders of his grandfather. Husayn's special place vis. a vis. the divine Messenger makes his eventual fate at the hands of the harsh army more poignant. Further, as the Sura of Ikhlas (#112) has a special significance in the Qur'an, ⁵² so he occupies a privileged position for the followers of Islam. With his superlative attributes and in the excellence of his nature, he represents the antithesis for the demonic authorities. He is contrasted with the evil of Yazid (b. Mu'awiya) as Moses is contrasted with the Pharaoh.

In this poem, the cataclysmic tragedy at Karbala, which occurred in 680 AD, is described by Iqbal as a cosmic phenomenon. Though calamitous, the event caused the social-conscience to be revitalized in the quest for truth. Husayn's blood was shed like rain on the harsh desert arena and resulted in a bloom of red tulip blossoms. With his

⁵¹ In love lyrics, the cypress is the traditional image for the perfection of a person, usually the 'beloved.'

⁵² It is considered to contain a third of the message of the Qur'an.

courage he had withstood tyranny and managed to challenge despotism until the Day of Judgment. The wave of his blood that created a garden symbolizes the harmony and peace that follows a sacrifice made for Truth. Though his enemies were numerous as grains of sand in the desert, his single friend was Almighty God. He personified the spiritual secrets of Abraham and Ishmael. His determination was strong and steadfast like the mountains. His sword was used solely for the prestige of Islam, and his only aim was the protection of the sacred Qur'an's edicts. Iqbal states thus in the *Rumuz-i Bikhudi* (The Secrets of Rapture):

*When his blood elucidated these mysteries, it
awakened the slumbering community.*

*When he drew forth the sword of la (no) from
sheath, he drew blood from the veins of the friends of
falsehood.*

*When he wrote the sign of illa (except) Allah in
the desert, he wrote sentences on the subject of our
liberation.*

*We learnt the mystery of the Qur'an from
Husayn; from his fire we acquired flames.*
(Iq. Pe. 111, vv. 4-6)

And Iqbal continues:

*Though the glory of Damascus and Baghdad is
past, and the power of Granada has also vanished
from our memory,*

*Our strings still move with his plectrum and also
our faith is as yet fresh with his takbir.*

*And in conclusion he entreats the morning
zephyr:⁵³*

⁵³ Sana'i had also associated the zephyr with the fragrance from Karbala. S. Had. 270, v. 1; 271, v. 5.

*O zephyr, O messenger for the those fallen far
away, transport our tears to his pure dust.*
(Iq.Pe.111,vv.10-12)

Conclusion

The depiction of the superlative energy of integrity in existence, the enhancement of the ethical functions of humanity, the demonstration of the dynamic zeal of the altruistic leader, the portrayal of the virtuous mirror of the seeker of truth and justice, the honorable witness for compassion—all this and more was represented by ‘Ali for the community in the time honored tradition of poetic literature in Islamic societies. In the post 1900s era with myriad challenges and complicated issues, Iqbal cherished these facets of the enduring hero and sought to bring forth his legacy as a beacon that would direct the community towards the pathways of progress and development, peace and prosperity.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ For a further discussion of this subject, refer to Habibeh Rahim, *Perfection Manifested: ‘Ali b. Abi Talib’s Image in Classical Persian and Modern Indian Muslim Poetry*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1989.

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